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AN  
EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

WHEREIN  
EACH CHAPTER IS SUMMED UP IN ITS CONTENTS: THE SACRED TEXT INSERTED AT LARGE  
IN DISTINCT PARAGRAPHS; EACH PARAGRAPH REDUCED TO ITS PROPER  
HEADS: THE SENSE GIVEN, AND LARGELY ILLUSTRATED:

WITH  
PRACTICAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS.

BY  
MATTHEW HENRY,

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

A NEW EDITION, CAREFULLY REVISED AND CORRECTED.  
IN NINE VOLUMES.

VOL. VI.—EZEKIEL TO MALACHI.

LONDON:  
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AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET  
EZEKIEL.

WHEN we entered upon the writings of the prophets, which speak of the things that should be hereafter, we seemed to have the same call that St. John had (Rev. iv. 1), *Come up hither*; but, when we enter upon the prophecy of this book, it is as if the voice said, *Come up higher*; as we go forward in time (for Ezekiel prophesied in the captivity, as Jeremiah prophesied just before it), so we soar upward in discoveries yet more sublime in the divine glory. These waters of the sanctuary still grow deeper; so far are they from being fordable that in some places they are scarcely fathomable; yet, deep as they are, out of them flow streams which make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. As to this prophecy now before us, we may enquire, I. Concerning the penman of it—it was Ezekiel; his name signifies, *The strength of God, or one girt or strengthened of God*. He girded up the loins of his mind to the service, and God put strength into him. Whom God calls to any service he will himself enable for it; if he give commission, he will give power to execute it. Ezekiel's name was answered when God said (and no doubt did as he said), *I have made thy face strong against their faces*. The learned Selden, in his book *De Diis Syris*, says that it was the opinion of some of the ancients that the prophet Ezekiel was the same with that Nazaratus Assyrius whom Pythagoras (as himself relates) had for his tutor for some time, and whose lectures he attended. It is agreed that they lived much about the same time; and we have reason to think that many of the Greek philosophers were acquainted with the sacred writings and borrowed some of the best of their notions from them. If we may give credit to the tradition of the Jews, he was put to death by the captives in Babylon, for his faithfulness and boldness in reproving them; it is stated that they dragged him upon the stones till his brains were dashed out. An Arabic historian says that he was put to death and was buried in the sepulchre of Shem the son of Noah. So Hottinger relates, *Thesaur. Philol. lib. ii. cap. 1*. II. Concerning the date of it—the place whence it is dated and the time when. The scene is laid in Babylon, when it was a house of bondage to the Israel of God; there the prophecies of this book were preached, there they were written, when the prophet himself, and the people to whom he prophesied, were captives there. Ezekiel and Daniel are the only writing prophets of the Old Testament who lived and prophesied any where but in the land of Israel, except we add Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to prophesy: Ezekiel prophesied in the beginning of the captivity, Daniel in the latter end of it. It was an indication of God's good-will to them, and his gracious designs concerning them in their affliction, that he raised up prophets among them, both to convince them when, in the beginning of their troubles, they were secure and unhumiliated, which was Ezekiel's business, and to comfort them when, in the latter end of their troubles, they were dejected and discouraged. If the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have used such apt and proper means to cure them. III. Concerning the matter and scope of it. 1. There is much in it that is very mysterious, dark, and hard to be understood, especially in the beginning and the latter end of it, which therefore the Jewish rabbins forbade the reading of to their young men, till they came to be thirty years of age, lest by the difficulties they met with there they should be prejudiced against the scriptures; but if we read these difficult parts of scripture with humility and reverence, and search them diligently, though we may not be able to untie all the knots we meet with, any more than we can solve all the phenomena in the book of nature, yet we may from them, as from the book of nature, gather a great deal for the confirming of our faith and the encouraging of our hope in the God we worship. 2. Though the visions here be intricate, such as an elephant may swim in, yet the sermons are mostly plain, such as a lamb may wade in; and the chief design of them is to show God's people their transgressions, that in their captivity they might be repenting and not repining. It should seem, the prophet was constantly attended (for we read of their sitting before him as God's people sat to hear his words, *ch. xxxiii. 31*), and that he was occasionally consulted, for we read of the elders of Israel who came to enquire of the Lord by him, *ch. xiv. 1, 3*. And, as it was of great use to the oppressed captives themselves to have a prophet with them, so it was a testimony to their holy religion against their oppressors who ridiculed it and them. 3. Though the reproofs and the threatenings here are very sharp and bold, yet towards the close of the book very comfortable assurances are given of great mercy God had in store for them; and there, at length, we shall meet with something that has reference to gospel times, and which was to have its accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, of whom indeed this prophet speaks less than almost any of the prophets. But by opening the *errors of the Lord* he prepares Christ's way. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and so it becomes our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The visions which were the prophet's credentials we have *ch. i. i.—iii.*, the reproofs and threatenings *ch. iv.—xxiv.*, betwixt which and the comforts which we have in the latter part of the book we have messages sent to the nations that bordered upon the land of Israel, whose destruction is foretold (*ch. xxv.—xxxv.*), to make way for the restoration of God's Israel and the re-establishment of their city and temple, which are foretold *ch. xxxvi.* to the end. Those who would apply the comforts to themselves must apply the convictions to themselves.

#### CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have 1. The common circumstances of the prophecy now to be delivered, the time when it was delivered (*ver. 1*), the place where (*ver. 2*), and the person by whom, *ver. 3*. 11. The uncommon introduction to it by a vision of the glory of God, *ch. i.* In his attendance and retinue in the upper world, where his throne is surrounded with angels, here called "living creatures," *ver. 4—14*. 2. In his providences concerning the lower world, represented by the wheels and their motions, *ver. 15—28*. 3. In the face of Jesus Christ sitting upon the throne, *ver. 26—28*. And the more we are acquainted, and the more intimately we converse, with the glory of God in these three branches of it, the more commanding influence will Divine revelation have upon us and the more ready shall we be to submit to it, which is the thing aimed at in prefacing the prophecies of this book with these visions. When such a God of glory speaks, it concerns us to hear with attention and reverence; it is at our peril if we do not.

NOW it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was

among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. 2 In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, 3 The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Busi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.



The circumstances of the vision which Ezekiel saw, and in which he received his commission and instructions, are here very particularly set down, that the narrative may appear to be authentic and not romantic. It may be of use to keep an account when and where God has been pleased to manifest himself to our souls in a peculiar manner, that the *return of the day*, and our return to the *place of the altar* (Gen. xiii. 4). may revive the pleasing grateful remembrance of God's favour to us. "Remember, O my soul! and never forget what communications of divine love thou didst receive at such a time, at such a place; tell others what God did for thee."

I. The time when Ezekiel had this vision is here recorded. It was *in the thirtieth year, v. 1.* Some make it the thirtieth year of the prophet's age; being a priest, he was at that age to enter upon the full execution of the priestly office, but being debarred from that by the iniquity and calamity of the times, now that they had neither temple nor altar, God at that age called him to the dignity of a prophet. Others make it to be the thirtieth year from the beginning of the reign of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, from which the Chaldeans began a new computation of time, as they had done from Nabonassar 123 years before. Nabopolassar reigned nineteen years, and this was the eleventh of his son, which makes the thirty. And it was proper enough for Ezekiel, when he was in Babylon, to use the computation they there used, as we in foreign countries date by the new style; and he afterwards uses the melancholy computation of his own country, observing (v. 2) that it was the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. But the Chaldee paraphrase fixes upon another era, and says that this was the thirtieth year after Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law in the house of the sanctuary, at midnight, after the setting of the moon, in the days of Josiah the king. And it is true that this was just thirty years from that time; and that was an event so remarkable (as it put the Jewish state upon a new trial) that it was proper enough to date from it; and perhaps therefore the prophet speaks indefinitely of thirty years, as having an eye both to that event and to the Chaldean computation, which were coincident. It was in the *fourth month*, answering to our June, and in the *fifth day of the month*, that Ezekiel had this vision, v. 2. It is probable that it was on the sabbath day, because we read (ch. iii. 16) that *at the end of seven days*, which we may well suppose to be the next sabbath, the word of the Lord came to him again. Thus John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, when he saw the visions of the Almighty, Rev. i. 10. God would hereby put an honour upon his sabbaths, when the enemies mocked at them, Lam. i. 7. And he would thus encourage his people to keep up their

attendance on the ministry of his prophets every sabbath day, by the extraordinary manifestations of himself on some sabbath days.

II. The melancholy circumstances he was in when God honoured him, and thereby favoured his people, with this vision. He was *in the land of the Chaldeans, among the captives, by the river of Chebar, and it was in the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity.* Observe,

1. The people of God were now, some of them, *captives in the land of the Chaldeans.* The body of the Jewish nation yet remained in their own land, but these were the first-fruits of the captivity, and they were some of the best; for in Jeremiah's vision these were the *good figs*, whom God had *sent into the land of the Chaldeans for their good* (Jer. xxiv. 5); and, that it might be for their good, God raised up a prophet among them, *to teach them out of the law*, then when he chastened them, Ps. xciv. 12. Note, It is a great mercy to have the word of God brought to us, and a great duty to attend to it diligently, when we are in affliction. The word of instruction and the rod of correction may be of great service to us, in concert and concurrence with each other, the word to explain the rod and the rod to enforce the word: both together give wisdom. It is happy for a man, when he is sick and in pain, to have a messenger with him, an interpreter, *one among a thousand*, if he have but his *ear open to discipline*, Job xxiii. 23. One of the quarrels God had with the Jews, when he sent them into captivity, was for *mocking his messengers and misusing his prophets*; and yet, when they were suffering for this sin, he favoured them with this forfeited mercy. It were ill with us if God did not sometimes graciously thrust upon us those means of grace and salvation which we have foolishly thrust from us. In their captivity they were destitute of ordinary helps for their souls, and therefore God raised them up these extraordinary ones; for God's children, if they be hindered in their education one way, shall have it made up another way. But observe, *It was in the fifth year of the captivity* that Ezekiel was raised up among them, and not before. So long God left them without any prophet, till they began to *lament after the Lord* and to complain that they *saw not their signs* and there was none to *tell them how long* (Ps. lxxiv. 9), and then they would know how to value a prophet, and God's discoveries of himself to them by him would be the more acceptable and comfortable. The Jews that remained in their own land had Jeremiah with them, those that had gone into captivity had Ezekiel with them; for wherever the children of God are scattered abroad he will find out tutors for them.

2. The prophet was himself among the captives, those of them that were posted by *the river Chebar*; for it was *by the rivers of*

Babylon that they *sat down*, and on the willow-trees by the river's side that they *hunged their harps*, Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2. The planters in America keep along by the sides of the rivers, and perhaps those captives were employed by their masters in improving some parts of the country by the rivers' sides that were uncultivated, the natives being generally employed in war; or they employed them in manufactures, and therefore chose to fix them by the sides of rivers, that the goods they made might the more easily be conveyed by water-carriage. Interpreters agree not what river this of Chebar was, but among the *captives* by that river Ezekiel was, and himself a captive. Observe here, (1.) The best men, and those that are dearest to God, often share, not only in the common calamities of this life, but in the public and national judgments that are inflicted for sin; those feel the smart who contributed nothing to the guilt, by which it appears that the difference between good and bad arises not from the events that befall them, but from the temper and disposition of their spirits under them. And since not only righteous men, but prophets, share with the worst in present punishments, we may infer thence, with the greatest assurance, that there are rewards reserved for them in the future state. (2.) Words of conviction, counsel, and comfort, come best to those who are in affliction from their fellow sufferers. The captives will be best instructed by one who is a captive among them and experimentally knows their sorrows. (3.) The spirit of prophecy was not confined to the land of Israel, but some of the brightest of divine revelations were revealed in the land of the Chaldeans, which was a happy presage of the carrying of the church, with that divine revelation upon which it is built, into the Gentile world; and, as now, so afterwards, when the gospel kingdom was to be set up, the dispersion of the Jews contributed to the spreading of the knowledge of God. (4.) Wherever we are we may keep up our communion with God. *Undique ad cælos tantundem est via*—From the remotest corners of the earth we may find a way open heavenward. (5.) When God's ministers are bound the word of the Lord is not bound, 2 Tim. ii. 9. When St. Paul was a prisoner the gospel had a free course. When St. John was banished into the Isle of Patmos Christ visited him there. Nay, God's suffering servants have generally been treated as favourites, and their consolations have much more abounded when affliction has abounded, 2 Cor. i. 5.

III. The discovery which God was pleased to make of himself to the prophet when he was in these circumstances, to be by him communicated to his people. He here tells us what he saw, what he heard, and what he felt. 1. He saw visions of God, v. 1. No man can see God and live; but many have

seen visions of God, such displays of the divine glory as have both instructed and affected them; and commonly, when God first revealed himself to any prophet, he did it by an extraordinary vision, as to Isaiah (ch. vi.), to Jeremiah (ch. i.), to Abraham (Acts vii. 2), to settle a correspondence and a satisfactory way of intercourse, so that there needed not afterwards a vision upon every revelation. Ezekiel was employed in turning the hearts of the people to the Lord their God, and therefore he must himself see the visions of God. Note, It concerns those to be well acquainted with God themselves, and much affected with what they know of him, whose business it is to bring others to the knowledge and love of him. That he might see the *visions of God the heavens were opened*; the darkness and distance which hindered his visions were conquered, and he was let into the light of the glories of the upper world, as near and clear as if heaven had been opened to him. 2. He heard the voice of God (v. 3): *The word of the Lord came expressly to him*, and what he saw was designed to prepare him for what he was to hear. The expression is emphatic. *Essendo fuit verbum Dei*—The word of the Lord was as really it was to him. There was no mistake in it; it came to him in the fulness of its light and power, in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit; it came close to him, nay, it came into him, took possession of him and dwelt in him richly. It came expressly, or accurately, to him; he did himself clearly understand what he said and was abundantly satisfied of the truth of it. *The essential Word* (so we may take it), the Word who is, who is what he is, came to Ezekiel, to send him on his errand. 3. He felt the power of God opening his eyes to see the visions, opening his ear to hear the voice, and opening his heart to receive both: *The hand of the Lord was there upon him*. Note, *The hand of the Lord* goes along with the word of the Lord, and so it becomes effectual; those only understand and believe the report to whom the arm of the Lord is revealed. *The hand of God was upon him*, as upon Moses, to cover him, that he should not be overcome by the dazzling light and lustre of the visions he saw, Exod. xxxiii. 22. *It was upon him* (as upon St. John, Rev. i. 17), to revive and support him, that he might bear up, and not faint, under these discoveries, that he might neither be lifted up nor cast down with the abundance of the revelations. God's grace is sufficient for him, and, in token of that, his hand is upon him.

4 And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour



of amber, out of the midst of the fire. 5 Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. 6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. 7 And their feet *were* straight feet; and the sole of their feet *was* like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. 8 And *they had* the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings, 9 Their wings *were* joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. 10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus *were* their faces: and their wings *were* stretched upward; two *wings* of every one *were* joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. 12 And they went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; *and* they turned not when they went. 13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, *and* like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. 14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

The visions of God which Ezekiel here saw were very glorious, and had more particulars than those which other prophets saw. It is the scope and intention of these visions, 1. To possess the prophet's mind with very great, and high, and honourable thoughts of that God by whom he was commissioned and for whom he was employed. It is *the likeness of the glory of the Lord* that he sees (v. 28), and hence he may infer that it is his honour to serve him, for he is one whom angels serve. He may serve him with safety, for he has power sufficient to bear him out in his work. It is at his peril to draw back from his service, for he has power to pursue him, as he did Jonah. So great a God as this must be served *with reverence and godly fear*; and with assur-

ance may Ezekiel foretell what this God will do, for he is able to make his words good. 2. To strike a terror upon the sinners who remained in Zion, and those who had already come to Babylon, who were secure, and bade defiance to the threatenings of Jerusalem's ruin, as we have found in Jeremiah's prophecy, and shall find in this, many did. "Let those who said, *We shall have peace though we go on*, know that *our God is a consuming fire*, whom they cannot stand before." That this vision had a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem seems plain from ch. xliii. 3, where he says that it was *the vision which he saw when he came to destroy the city*, that is, to prophesy the destruction of it. 3. To speak comfort to those that feared God, and trembled at his word, and humbled themselves under his mighty hand. "Let them know that, though they are captives in Babylon, yet they have God nigh unto them; though they have not *the place of the sanctuary* to be their glorious high throne, they have the God of the sanctuary." Dr. Lightfoot observes, "Now that the church is to be planted for a long time in another country, the Lord shows a glory in the midst of them, as he had done at their first constituting into a church in the wilderness; and out of a *cloud and fire*, as he had done there, he showed himself; and from between *living creatures*, as from between the cherubim, he gives his oracles." This put an honour upon them, by which they might value themselves when the Chaldeans insulted over them, and this might encourage their hopes of deliverance in due time.

Now, to answer these ends, we have in these verses the first part of the vision, which represents God as attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, who are all his messengers, his ministers, *doing his commandments and hearkening to the voice of his word*. This denotes his grandeur, as it magnifies an earthly prince to have a splendid retinue and numerous armies at his command, which engages his allies to trust him and his enemies to fear him.

I. The introduction to this vision of the angels is very magnificent and awakening, v. 4. The prophet, observing the heavens to open, *looked, looked up* (as it was time), to see what discoveries God would make to him. Note, When the heavens are opened it concerns us to have our eyes open. To clear the way, *behold, a whirlwind came out of the north*, which would drive away the interposing mists of this lower region. Fair weather *comes out of the north*, and thence *the wind comes that drives away rain*. God can by a whirlwind clear the sky and air, and produce that serenity of mind which necessary to our communion with Heaven. Yet this whirlwind was attended with a *great cloud*. When we think that the clouds which arise from this earth are dispelled, and we can see beyond them, yet still there



is a cloud which heavenly things are wrapped in, a cloud from above, so that we cannot order our speech concerning them by reason of darkness. Christ here descended, as he ascended, in a cloud. Some by this whirlwind and cloud understand the Chaldean army coming out of the north against the land of Judah, bearing down all before them as a tempest; and so it agrees with that which was signified by one of the first of Jeremiah's visions (Jer. i. 14, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth*); but I take it here as an introduction rather to the vision than to the sermons. This whirlwind came to Ezekiel (as that to Elijah, 1 Kings xix. 11), to prepare the way of the Lord, and to demand attention. *He that has eyes, that has ears, let him see, let him hear.*

II. The vision itself. A great cloud was the vehicle of this vision, in which it was conveyed to the prophet; for God's pavilion in which he rests, his chariot in which he rides, is darkness and thick clouds, Ps. xviii. 11; civ. 3. Thus he holds back the face of his throne, lest its dazzling light and lustre should overpower us, by spreading a cloud upon it. Now,

1. The cloud is accompanied with a fire, as upon Mount Sinai, where God resided in a thick cloud; but the sight of his glory was like devouring fire (Exod. xxiv. 16, 17), and his first appearance to Moses was in a flame of fire in the bush; for our God is a consuming fire. This was a fire enfolding itself, a globe, or orb, or wheel of fire. God being his own cause, his own rule, and his own end, if he be as a fire, he is as a fire enfolding itself, or (as some read it) kindled by itself. The fire of God's glory shines forth, but it quickly enfolds itself; for he lets us know but part of his ways; the fire of God's wrath breaks forth, but it also quickly enfolds itself, for the divine patience suffers not all his wrath to be stirred up. If it were not a fire thus enfolding itself, O Lord! who shall stand?

2. The fire is surrounded with a glory: A brightness was about it, in which it enfolded itself, yet it made some discovery of itself. Though we cannot see into the fire, cannot by searching find out God to perfection, yet we see the brightness that is round about it, the reflection of this fire from the thick cloud. Moses might see God's back parts, but not his face. We have some light concerning the nature of God, from the brightness which encompasses it, though we have not an insight into it, by reason of the cloud spread upon it. Nothing is more easy than to determine that God is, nothing more difficult than to describe what he is. When God displays his wrath as fire, yet there is a brightness about it; for his holiness and justice appear very illustrious in the punishment of sin and sinners: even about the devouring fire there is a brightness, which glorified saints will for ever admire.

3. Out of this fire there shines the colour of amber. We are not told who or what it was that had this colour of amber, and therefore I take it to be the whole frame of the following vision, which came into Ezekiel's view out of the midst of the fire and brightness; and the first thing he took notice of before he viewed the particulars was that it was of the colour of amber, or the eye of amber; that is, it looked as amber does to the eye, of a bright flaming fiery colour, the colour of a burning coal; so some think it should be read. The living creatures which he saw coming out of the midst of the fire were seraphim—burners; for he maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire.

4. That which comes out of the fire, of a fiery amber colour, when it comes to be distinctly viewed, is the likeness of four living creatures; not the living creatures themselves (angels are spirits, and cannot be seen), but the likeness of them, such a hieroglyphic, or representation, as God saw fit to make use of for the leading of the prophet, and us with him, into some acquaintance with the world of angels (a matter purely of divine revelation), so far as is requisite to possess us with an awful sense of the greatness of that God who has angels for his attendants, and the goodness of that God who has appointed them to be attendants on his people. The likeness of these living creatures came out of the midst of the fire; for angels derive their being and power from God; they are in themselves, and to us, what he is pleased to make them; their glory is a ray of his. The prophet himself explains this vision (ch. x. 20): *I knew that the living creatures were the cherubim*, which is one of the names by which the angels are known in scripture. To Daniel was made known their number, *ten thousand times ten thousand*, Dan. vii. 10. But, though they are many, yet they are one, and that is made known to Ezekiel here; they are one in nature and operation, as an army, consisting of thousands, is yet called a body of men. We have here an account of,

(1.) Their nature. They are living creatures; they are the creatures of God, the work of his hands; their being is derived; they have not life in and of themselves, but receive it from him who is the fountain of life. As much as the living creatures of this lower world excel the vegetables that are the ornaments of earth, so much do the angels, the living creatures of the upper world, excel the sun, moon, and stars, the ornaments of the heavens. The sun (say some) is a flame of fire enfolding itself, but it is not a living creature, as angels, those flames of fire, are. Angels are living creatures, living beings, emphatically so. Men on earth are dying creatures, dying daily (in the midst of life we are in death), but angels in heaven are living creatures; they live indeed, live to good purpose; and, when saints come to

be equal unto the angels, they shall not die any more, Luke xx. 36.

(2.) Their number. They are four; so they appear here, though they are innumerable; not as if these were four particular angels set up above the rest, as some have fondly imagined, Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel, but for the sake of the four faces they put on, and to intimate their being sent forth towards the four winds of heaven, Matt. xxiv. 31. Zechariah saw them as four chariots going forth east, west, north, and south, Zech. vi. 1. God has messengers to send every way; for his kingdom is universal, and reaches to all parts of the world.

(3.) Their qualifications, by which they are fitted for the service of their Maker and Master. These are set forth figuratively and by similitude, as is proper in visions, which are parables to the eye. Their description here is such, and so expressed, that I think it is not possible by it to form an exact idea of them in our fancies, or with the pencil, for that would be a temptation to worship them; but the several instances of their fitness for the work they are employed in are intended in the several parts of this description. Note, It is the greatest honour of God's creatures to be in a capacity of answering the end of their creation; and the more ready we are to every good work the nearer we approach to the dignity of angels. These living creatures are described here,

[1.] By their general appearance: *They had the likeness of a man*; they appeared, for the main, in a human shape, *First*, To signify that these living creatures are reasonable creatures, intelligent beings, who have that spirit of a man which is the candle of the Lord. *Secondly*, To put an honour upon the nature of man, who is made lower, yet but a little lower, than the angels, in the very next rank of beings below them. When the invisible intelligences of the upper world would make themselves visible, it is in the likeness of man. *Thirdly*, To intimate that their delights are with the sons of men, as their Master's are (Prov. viii. 31), that they do service to men, and men may have spiritual communion with them by faith, hope, and holy love. *Fourthly*, The angels of God appear in the likeness of man because in the fulness of time the Son of God was not only to appear in that likeness, but to assume that nature; they therefore show this love to it. [2.] By their faces: *Every one had four faces*, looking four several ways. In St. John's vision, which has a near affinity with this, each of the four living creatures has one of these faces here mentioned (Rev. iv. 7); here each of them has all four, to intimate that they have all the same qualifications for service; though, perhaps, among the angels of heaven, as among the angels of the churches, some excel in one gift and others in another, but

all for the common service. Let us contemplate their faces till we be in some measure changed into the same image, that we may do the will of God as the angels do it in heaven. *They all four had the face of a man* (for in that likeness they appeared, v. 5), but, besides that, they had the face of a lion, an ox, and an eagle, each masterly in its kind, the lion among wild beasts, the ox among tame ones, and the eagle among fowls, v. 10. Does God make use of them for the executing of judgments upon his enemies? They are fierce and strong as the lion and the eagle in tearing their prey. Does he make use of them for the good of his people? They are as oxen strong for labour and inclined to serve. And in both they have the understanding of a man. The scattered perfections of the living creatures on earth meet in the angels of heaven. They have the likeness of man; but, because there are some things in which man is excelled even by the inferior creatures, they are therefore compared to some of them. They have the understanding of a man, and such as far exceeds it; they also resemble man in tenderness and humanity. But, *First*, A lion excels man in strength and boldness, and is much more formidable; therefore the angels, who in this resemble them, put on the face of a lion. *Secondly*, An ox excels man in diligence, and patience, and painstaking, and an unwearied discharge of the work he has to do; therefore the angels, who are constantly employed in the service of God and the church, put on the face of an ox. *Thirdly*, An eagle excels man in quickness and piercingness of sight, and in soaring high; and therefore the angels, who seek things above, and see far into divine mysteries, put on the face of a flying eagle.

[3.] By their wings: *Every one had four wings*, v. 6. In the vision Isaiah had of them they appeared with six, now with four; for they appeared above the throne, and had occasion for two to cover their faces with. The angels are fitted with wings to fly swiftly on God's errands; whatever business God sends them upon they lose no time. Faith and hope are the soul's wings, upon which it soars upward; pious and devout affections are its wings on which it is carried forward with vigour and alacrity. The prophet observes here, concerning their wings, *First*, That they were joined one to another, v. 9 and again v. 11. They did not make use of their wings for fighting, as some birds do; there is no contest among the angels. God makes peace, perfect peace, in his high places. But their wings were joined, in token of their perfect unity and unanimity and the universal agreement there is among them. *Secondly*, That they were stretched upward, extended, and ready for use, not folded up, or flagging. Let an angel receive the least intimation of the divine will, and he has nothing to seek, but



is upon the wing immediately; while our poor dull souls are like the ostrich, that with much difficulty lifts up herself on high. *Thirdly*, That two of their wings were made use of in covering their bodies, the spiritual bodies they assumed. The clothes that cover us are our hindrance in work; angels need no other covering than their own wings, which are their furtherance. They cover their bodies from us, so forbidding us needless enquiries concerning them. Ask not after them, for they are wonderful, Judg. xiii. 18. They cover them before God, so directing us, when we approach to God, to see to it that we be so clothed with Christ's righteousness that the shame of our nakedness may not appear. [4.] By their feet, including their legs and thighs: They were *straight feet* (v. 7); they stood straight, and firm, and steady; no burden of service could make their legs to bend under them. The spouse makes this part of the description of her beloved, that *his legs were as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold* (Cant. v. 15); such are the angels' legs. *The sole of their feet was like that of a calf's foot*, which divides the hoof and is therefore clean: *as it were the sole of a round foot* (as the Chaldee words it); they were ready for motion any way. *Their feet were winged* (so the LXX.); they went so swiftly that it was as if they flew. And their very feet *sparkled like the colour of burnished brass*; not only of the faces, but the very feet, of those are beautiful whom God sends on his errands (Isa. lii. 7); every step the angels take is glorious. In the vision John had of Christ it is said, *His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace*, Rev. i. 15. [5.] By their hands (v. 8): *They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides*, an arm and a hand under every wing. They had not only wings for motion, but hands for action. Many are quick who are not active; they hurry about a great deal, but do nothing to purpose, bring nothing to pass; they have wings, but no hands: whereas God's servants, the angels, not only go when he sends them and come when he calls them, but do what he bids them. They are *the hands of a man*, which are wonderfully made and fitted for service, which are guided by reason and understanding; for what angels do they do intelligently and with judgment. They have calves' feet; this denotes the swiftness of their motion (the cedars of Lebanon are said to *skip like a calf*, Ps. xxix. 6); but they have a man's hand, which denotes the niceness and exactness of their performances, as the heavens are said to be the work of God's fingers. Their hands were *under their wings*, which concealed them, as they did the rest of their bodies. Note, The agency of angels is a secret thing and their work is carried on in an invisible way. In working for God, though we must not, with *the sluggard*, hide

our hand in our bosom, yet we must, with the humble, *not let our left hand know what our right hand doeth*. We may observe that where these wings were their hands were *under their wings*; wherever their wings carried them they carried hands along with them, to be still doing something suitable, something that the duty of the place requires.

(4.) Their motions. The living creatures are moving. Angels are active beings; it is not their happiness to sit still and do nothing, but to be always well employed; and we must reckon ourselves then best when we are doing good, doing it as the angels do it, of whom it is here observed, [1.] That whatever service they went about *they went every one straight forward* (v. 9, 12), which intimates, *First*, That they sincerely aimed at the glory of God, and had a single eye to that, in all they did. Their going *straight forward* supposes that they looked straight forward, and never had any sinister intentions in what they did. And, if thus *our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light*. The singleness of the eye is the sincerity of the heart. *Secondly*, That they were intent upon the service they were employed in, and did it with a close application of mind. They went forward with their work; for what their hand found to do they did *with all their might* and did not loiter in it. *Thirdly*, That they were unanimous in it: *They went straight forward*, every one about his own work; they did not thwart or jostle one another, did not stand in one another's light, in one another's way. *Fourthly*, That they perfectly understood their business, and were thoroughly apprised of it, so that they needed not to stand still, to pause or hesitate, but pursue their work with readiness, as those that knew what they had to do and how to do it. *Fifthly*, They were steady and constant in their work. They did not fluctuate, did not tire, did not vary, but were of a piece with themselves. They moved in a direct line, and so went the nearest way to work in all they did and lost no time. When we go straight we go forward; when we serve God with one heart we rid ground, we rid work. [2.] *They turned not when they went*, v. 9, 12. *First*, They made no blunders or mistakes, which would give them occasion to turn back to rectify them; their work needed no correction, and therefore needed not to be gone over again. *Secondly*, They minded no diversions; as they turned not back, so they turned not aside, to trifle with any thing that was foreign to their business. [3.] *They went whither the Spirit was to go* (v. 12), either, *First*, *Whither* their own spirit was disposed to go; thither *they went*, having no bodies, as we have, to clog or hinder them. It is our infelicity and daily burden that, when the spirit is willing, yet the flesh is weak and cannot keep pace with it, so that the good which we would do we do it not; but



angels and glorified saints labour under no such impotency; whatever they incline or intend to do they do it, and never come short of it. Or, rather, *Secondly*, Whithersoever the Spirit of God would have them go, thither they went. Though they had so much wisdom of their own, yet in all their motions and actions they subjected themselves to the guidance and government of the divine will. Whithersoever the divine Providence was to go they went, to serve its purposes and to execute its orders. The Spirit of God (says Mr. Greenhill) is the great agent that sets angels to work, and it is their honour that they are led, they are easily led, by the Spirit. See how tractable and obsequious these noble creatures are. Whithersoever the Spirit is to go they go immediately, with all possible alacrity. Note, Those that walk after the Spirit do the will of God as the angels do it. [4.] They ran and returned like a flash of lightning, v. 14. This intimates, *First*, That they made haste; they were quick in their motions, as quick as lightning. Whatever business they went about they despatched it immediately, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Happy they that have no bodies to retard their motion in holy exercises. And happy shall we be when we come to have spiritual bodies for spiritual work. Satan falls like lightning into his own ruin, Luke x. 18. Angels fly like lightning in their Master's work. The angel Gabriel flew swiftly. *Secondly*, That they made haste back: They ran and returned; ran to do their work and execute their orders, and then returned to give an account of what they had done and receive new instructions, that they might be always doing. They ran into the lower world, to do what was to be done there; but, when they had done it, they returned like a flash of lightning to the upper world again, to the beatific vision of their God, which they could not with any patience be longer from than their service did require. Thus we should be in the affairs of this world as out of our element. Though we run into them, we must not repose in them, but our souls must quickly return like lightning to God their rest and centre.

5. We have an account of the light by which the prophet saw these living creatures, or the looking-glass in which he saw them, v. 13. (1.) He saw them by their own light, for their appearance was like burning coals of fire; they are *seraphim*—burners, denoting the ardour of their love to God, their fervent zeal in his service, their splendour and brightness, and their terror against God's enemies. When God employs them to fight his battles they are as coals of fire (Ps. xviii. 12) to devour the adversaries, as lightnings shot out to discomfit them. (2.) He saw them by the light of some lamps, which went up and down among them, the shining whereof was very bright. Satan's works

are works of darkness; he is the ruler of the darkness of this world. But the angels of light are in the light, and, though they conceal their working, they show their work, for it will bear the light. But we see them and their works only by candle-light, by the dim light of lamps that go up and down among them; when the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, we shall see them clearly. Some make the appearance of these burning coals, and of the lightning that issues out of the fire, to signify the wrath of God, and his judgments, that were now to be executed upon Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, in which angels were to be employed; and accordingly we find afterwards coals of fire scattered upon the city to consume it, which were fetched from between the cherubim, ch. x. 2. But by the appearance of the lamps then we may understand the light of comfort which shone forth to the people of God in the darkness of this present trouble. If the ministry of the angels is as a consuming fire to God's enemies, it is as a rejoicing light to his own children. To the one this fire is bright, it is very reviving and refreshing; to the other, out of the fire comes fresh lightning to destroy them. Note, Good angels are our friends, or enemies, according as God is.

15 Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. 16 The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. 17 When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. 18 As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. 19 And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. 20 Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. 21 When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in

the wheels. 22 And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature *was* as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above. 23 And under the firmament *were* their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies. 24 And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of a host: when they stood, they let down their wings. 25 And there was a voice from the firmament that *was* over their heads, when they stood, *and* had let down their wings.

The prophet is very exact in making and recording his observations concerning this vision. And here we have,

I. The notice he took of the *wheels*, v. 15—21. The glory of God appears not only in the splendour of his retinue in the upper world, but in the steadiness of his government here in this lower world. Having seen how God does according to his will in the armies of heaven, let us now see how he does according to it among the inhabitants of the earth; for there, *on the earth*, the prophet saw the *wheels*, v. 15. *As he beheld the living creatures*, and was contemplating the glory of that vision and receiving instruction from it, this other vision presented itself to his view. Note, Those who make a good use of the discoveries God has favoured them with may expect further discoveries; for *to him that hath shall be given*. We are sometimes tempted to think there is nothing glorious but what is in the upper world, whereas, could we with an eye of faith discern the beauty of Providence and the wisdom, power, and goodness, which shine in the administration of that kingdom, we should see, and say, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth* and acts like himself. There are many things in this vision which give us some light concerning the divine Providence. 1. The dispensations of Providence are compared to *wheels*, either the wheels of a chariot, in which the conqueror rides in triumph, or rather the wheels of a clock or watch, which all contribute to the regular motion of the machine. We read of the *course* or *wheel of nature* (James iii. 6), which is here set before us as under the direction of the God of nature. *Wheels*, though they move not of themselves, as the *living creatures* do, are yet made movable and are almost continually kept in action.

Providence, represented by these *wheels*, produces changes; sometimes one spoke of the wheel is uppermost and sometimes another; but the motion of the wheel on its own axletree, like that of the orbs above, is very regular and steady. The motion of the wheels is circular; by the revolutions of Providence things are brought to the same posture and pass which they were in formerly; for *the thing that is is that which has been, and there is no new thing under the sun*, Eccl. i. 9, 10. 2. The wheel is said to be *by the living creatures*, who attended it to direct its motion; for the angels are employed as the ministers of God's providence, and have a greater hand in directing the motions of second causes to serve the divine purpose than we think they have. Such a close connexion is there between the *living creatures* and the *wheels* that they moved and rested together. Were angels busily employed? Men were busily employed as instruments in their hand, whether of mercy or judgment, though they themselves were not aware of it. Or, Are men active to compass their designs? Angels at the same time are acting to control and overrule them. This is much insisted on here (v. 19): *When the living creatures went*, to bring about any business, *the wheels went by them*; when God has work to do by the ministry of angels second causes are all found, or made, ready to concur in it; and (v. 21) *when those stood these stood*; when the angels had done their work the second causes had done theirs. If *the living creatures were lifted up from the earth*, were elevated to any service above the common course of nature and out of the ordinary road (as suppose in the working of miracles, the dividing of the water, the standing still of the sun), *the wheels*, contrary to their own natural tendency, which is towards the earth, move in concert with them, and *are lifted up over against them*; this is thrice mentioned, v. 19—21. Note, All inferior creatures are, and move, and act, as the Creator, by the ministration of angels, directs and influences them. Visible effects are managed and governed by invisible causes. The reason given of this is because *the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels*; the same wisdom, power, and holiness of God, the same will and counsel of his, that guides and governs the angels and all their performances, does, by them, order and dispose of all the motions of the creatures in this lower world and the events and issues of them. God is the soul of the world, and animates the whole, both that above and that beneath, so that they move in perfect harmony, as the upper and lower parts of the natural body do, so that *whithersoever the Spirit is to go* (whatever God wills and purposes to be done and brought to pass) *thither their spirit is to go*; that is, the angels, knowingly and designedly, set themselves to bring it about. And their



*spirit is in the wheels*, which are therefore *lifted up over against them*; that is, both the powers of nature and the wills of men are all made to serve the intention, which they infallibly and irresistibly effect, though perhaps *they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so*, Isa. x. 7; Mic. iv. 11, 12. Thus, though the will of God's precept be not *done on earth as it is done in heaven*, yet the will of his purpose and counsel is, and shall be.

3. The wheel is said to have four *faces*, looking four several ways (v. 15), denoting that the providence of God exerts itself in all parts of the world, east, west, north, and south, and extends itself to the remotest corners of it. Look which way you will upon the wheel of Providence, and it has a face towards you, a beautiful one, which you may admire the features and complexion of; it looks upon you as ready to speak to you, if you be but ready to hear the voice of it; like a well-drawn picture, it has an eye upon all that have an eye upon it. The wheel had so four *faces* that it had in it four *wheels*, which *went upon their four sides*, v. 17. At first Ezekiel saw it as *one wheel* (v. 15), one sphere; but afterwards he saw it was four, but *they four had one likeness* (v. 16); not only they were like one another, but they were as if they had been one. This intimates, (1.) That one event of providence is like another; what happens to us is *that which is common to men* and what we are not to think strange. (2.) That various events have a tendency to the same issue and concur to answer the same intention. 4. *Their appearance and their work* are said to be *like the colour of a beryl* (v. 16), *the colour of Tarshish* (so the word is), that is, of the sea; the beryl is of that colour, sea-green; *blue Neptune* we call it. The nature of things in this world is like that of the sea, which is in a continual flux and yet there is a constant coherence and succession of its parts. There is a chain of events which is always drawing one way or other. The sea ebbs and flows, so does Providence in its disposals, but always in the stated appointed times and measures. The sea looks blue, as the air does, because of the shortness and feebleness of our sight, which can see but a little way of either; to that colour therefore are *the appearance and work* of Providence fitly compared, because we cannot find out that which God does *from the beginning to the end*, Eccl. iii. 11. We see but *parts of his ways* (Job xxvi. 14), and all beyond looks blue, which gives us to understand no more concerning it but that in truth we know it not; it is *far above out of our sight*. 5. *Their appearance and their work* are likewise said to be *as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel*. Observe here again, *Their appearance* to the prophet is designed to set forth what *their work* really is. Men's appearance and their work often differ, but the appearance of God's providence and its work

agree; if they seem to differ, it is through our ignorance and mistake. Now both *were as a wheel in a wheel*, a less wheel moved by a greater. We pretend not to give a mathematical description of it. The meaning is that the disposals of Providence seem to us intricate, perplexed, and unaccountable, and yet that they will appear in the issue to have been all wisely ordered for the best; so that though *what God does we know not now*, yet *we shall know hereafter*, John xiii. 7. 6. The motion of these wheels, like that of the living creatures, was steady, regular, and constant: *They returned not when they went* (v. 17), because they never went amiss, nor otherwise than they should do. God, in his providence, takes his work before him, and he will have it forward; and it is going on even when it seems to us to be going backward. *They went* as the Spirit directed them, and therefore *returned not*. We should not have occasion to return back as we have. and to undo that by repentance which we have done amiss, and to do it over again, if we were but *led by the Spirit* and followed his direction. *The Spirit of life* (so some read it) *was in the wheels*, which carried them on with ease and evenness, and then *they returned not when they went*. 7. The *rings, or rims, of the wheels were so high that they were dreadful*, v. 18. They were of a vast circumference, so that when they were reared, and put in motion, the prophet was even afraid to look upon them. Note, The vast compass of God's thought, and the vast reach of his design, are really astonishing; when we go about to describe the circle of Providence we are struck with amazement and are even swallowed up. O the height and depth of God's councils! The consideration of them should strike an awe upon us. 8. They were *full of eyes round about*. This circumstance of the vision is most surprising of all, and yet most significant, plainly denoting that the motions of Providence are all directed by infinite wisdom. The issues of things are not determined by a blind fortune, but by those *eyes of the Lord* which *run to and fro through the earth*, and are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Note, It is a great satisfaction to us, and ought to be so, that, though we cannot account for the springs and tendencies of events, yet they are all under the cognizance and direction of an all-wise all-seeing God.

II. The notice he took of *the firmament above over the heads of the living creatures*. When he saw *the living creatures* moving, and *the wheels* by them, he looked up, as it is proper for us to do when we observe the various motions of providence in this lower world; looking up, he saw *the firmament stretched forth over the heads of the living creatures*, v. 22. What is done on earth is done under the heaven (as the scripture often speaks), under its inspection and influence.

Observe, 1. What he saw: *The firmament was as the colour of the terrible crystal*, truly glorious, but terribly so; the vastness and brightness of it put the prophet into an amazement and struck him with an awful reverence. *The terrible ice, or frost* (so it may be read), the colour of snow congealed, or as mountains of ice in the northern seas, which are very frightful. Daring sinners ask, *Can God judge through the dark cloud?* Job xxii. 13. But that which we take to be a dark cloud is to him transparent as crystal, through which, *from the place of his habitation, he looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth*, Ps. xxxiii. 14. *Under the firmament he saw the wings of the living creatures erect*, v. 23. When they pleased they used them either for flight or for covering, or two for flight and two for covering. God is on high, *above the firmament*; the angels are *under the firmament*, which denotes their subjection to God's dominion and their readiness to fly on his errands *in the open firmament of heaven*, and to serve him unanimously. 2. What he heard. (1.) He heard the *noise of the angels' wings*, v. 24. Bees and other insects make a great noise with the vibration of their wings; here the angels do so, to awaken the attention of the prophet to that which God was about to say to him *from the firmament*, v. 25. Angels, by the providences they are employed in, sound God's alarms to the children of men and stir them up to *hear his voice*; for that is it that *cries in the city* and is heard and understood by *the men of wisdom*. *The noise of their wings* was loud and terrible, *as the noise of great waters* (like the rout or roaring of the sea), and *as the noise of a host*, the noise of war; but it was articulate and intelligible, and did not give an uncertain sound; for it was *the voice of speech*; nay, it was *as the voice of the Almighty, for God, by his providences, speaks once, yea, twice*, if we could but perceive it, Job. xxxiii. 14. *The Lord's voice cries*, Mic. vi. 9. (2.) He heard a voice *from the firmament*, from him that sits upon the throne there, v. 25. When the angels moved they *made a noise with their wings*; but, when with that they had roused a careless world, they stood still, and *let down their wings*, that there might be a profound silence, and so God's voice might be the better heard. The voice of Providence is designed to open men's ears to the voice of the word, to do the office of the crier, who with a loud voice charges silence while the judge passes sentence. *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*. Note, Noises on earth should awaken our attention to the voice *from the firmament*; for *how shall we escape if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven!*

26 And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the like-

ness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. 27 And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. 28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.

All the other parts of this vision were but a preface and introduction to this. God in them had made himself known as Lord of angels and supreme director of all the affairs of this lower world, whence it is easy to infer that whatever God by his prophets either promises or threatens to do he is able to effect it. Angels are his servants; men are his tools. But now that a divine revelation is to be given to a prophet, and by him to the church, we must look higher than the living creatures or the wheels, and must expect that from the eternal Word, of whom we have an account in these verses. Ezekiel, hearing a voice from the firmament, looked up, as John did, to *see the voice that spoke with him*, and he *saw one like unto the Son of man*, Rev. i. 12, 13. The second person sometimes tried the *fashion of a man* occasionally before he clothed himself with it for good and all; and the Spirit of prophecy is called the *Spirit of Christ* (1 Pet. i. 11) and the *testimony of Jesus*, Rev. xix. 10. 1. This glory of Christ that the prophet saw was *above the firmament* that was *over the heads* of the living creatures, v. 26. Note, The heads of angels themselves are under the feet of the Lord Jesus; for the firmament that is over their heads is under his feet. *Angels, principalities, and powers are made subject to him*, 1 Pet. iii. 22. This dignity and dominion of the Redeemer before his incarnation magnify his condescension in his incarnation, when he was *made a little lower than the angels*, Heb. ii. 9. 2. The first thing he observed was a *throne*; for divine revelation comes backed and supported with a royal authority. We must have an eye of faith to God and Christ as upon a throne. The first thing that John discovered in his visions was a *throne set in heaven* (Rev. iv. 2), which commands reverence and subjection. It is a throne of glory, a throne of grace, a throne of triumph, a throne of government, a throne of judgment. *The Lord has prepared his throne in*



the heavens, has prepared it for his Son, whom he has set *King on his holy hill of Zion*. 3. On the throne he saw *the appearance of a man*. This is good news to the children of men, that the throne above the firmament is filled with one that is not ashamed to appear, even there, in the likeness of man. Daniel, in vision, saw the kingdom and dominion given to one *like the Son of man*, who therefore has authority given him to execute judgment because he is the Son of man (John v. 27), so appearing in these visions. 4. He saw him as a prince and judge upon this throne. Though he appeared in *fashion as a man*, yet he appeared in more than human glory, v. 27. (1.) Is God a *shining light*? So is he: when the prophet saw him he saw as the colour of amber, that is, a *brightness round about*; for God dwells in light, and covers himself with light as with a garment. How low did the Redeemer stoop for us when, to bring about our salvation, he suffered his glory to be eclipsed by the veil of his humanity! (2.) Is God a *consuming fire*? So is he: from his loins, both upward and downward, there was the appearance of fire. The fire above the loins was round about within the amber; it was inward and involved. That below the loins was more outward and open, and yet that also had *brightness round about*. Some make the former to signify Christ's divine nature, the glory and virtue of which are hidden within the colour of amber; it is what no man has seen nor can see. The latter they suppose to be his human nature, the glory of which there were those who saw; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, John i. 14. He had rays coming out of his hand, and yet there was the hiding of his power, Hab. iii. 4. The fire in which the Son of man appeared here might be intended to signify the judgments that were ready to be executed upon Judah and Jerusalem, coming from that fiery indignation of the Almighty which devours the adversaries. Nothing is more dreadful to the most daring sinners than the wrath of him that sits upon the throne, and of the Lamb, Rev. vi. 16. The day is coming when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire, 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. It concerns us therefore to kiss the Son lest he be angry. 5. The throne is surrounded with a rainbow, v. 28. It is so in St. John's vision, Rev. iv. 3. The brightness about it was of divers colours, as the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, which, as it is a display of majesty, and looks very great, so it is a pledge of mercy, and looks very kind; for it is a confirmation of the gracious promise God has made that he will not drown the world again, and he has said, *I will look upon the bow and remember the covenant*, Gen. ix. 16. This intimates that he who sits upon the throne is the Mediator of the covenant, that his dominion is for our protection, not our destruction, that he in-

terposes between us and the judgments our sins have deserved, and that *all the promises of God are in him yea and amen*. Now that the fire of God's wrath was breaking out against Jerusalem bounds should be set to it, and he would not make an utter destruction of it, for he would look upon the bow and remember the covenant, as he promised in such a case, Lev. xxvi. 42.

Lastly, We have the conclusion of this vision. Observe, 1. What notion the prophet himself had of it: *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*. Here, as all along, he is careful to guard against all gross corporeal thoughts of God, which might derogate from the transcendent purity of his nature. He does not say, *This was the Lord* (for he is invisible), but, *This was the glory of the Lord*, in which he was pleased to manifest himself a glorious being; yet it is not the glory of the Lord, but the likeness of that glory, some faint resemblance of it; nor is it any adequate likeness of that glory, but only the appearance of that likeness, a shadow of it, and not the very image of the thing, Heb. x. 1. 2. What impressions it made upon him: *When I saw it, I fell upon my face*. (1.) He was overpowered by it; the dazzling lustre of it conquered him and threw him upon his face; for *who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* Or, rather, (2.) He prostrated himself in a humble sense of his own unworthiness of the honour now done him, and of the infinite distance which he now, more than ever, perceived to be between him and God; he fell upon his face in token of that holy awe and reverence of God with which his mind was possessed and filled. Note, The more God is pleased to make known of himself to us the more low we should be before him. He fell upon his face to adore the majesty of God, to implore his mercy and to deprecate the wrath he saw ready to break out against the children of his people. 3. What instructions he had from it. All he saw was only to prepare him for that which he was to hear; for *faith comes by hearing*. He therefore heard a voice of one that spoke; for we are taught by words, not merely by hieroglyphics. When he fell on his face, ready to receive the word, then he heard the voice of one that spoke; for God delights to teach the humble.

#### CHAP. II.

What our Lord Jesus said to St. Paul (Acts xxvi. 16) may fitly be applied to the prophet Ezekiel, to whom the same Jesus is here speaking, "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister." We have here Ezekiel's ordination to his office, which the vision was designed to fit him for, not to entertain his curiosity with uncommon speculations, but to put him into business. Now here, I. He is commissioned to go as a prophet to the house of Israel, now captives in Babylon, and to deliver God's messages to them from time to time, ver. 1-5. II. He is cautioned not to be afraid of them, ver. 6. III. He is instructed what to say to them, and has words put into his mouth, signified by the vision of a roll, which he was ordered to eat (ver. 7-10), and which, in the next chapter, we find he did eat.

AND he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will

spake unto thee. 2 And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, *even* unto this very day. 4 For *they are* impudent children and stiff-hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. 5 And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.

The title here given to Ezekiel, as often afterwards, is very observable. God, when he speaks to him, calls him, *Son of man* (v. 1, 3), *Son of Adam*, *Son of the earth*. Daniel is once called so (Dan. viii. 17) and but once; the compellation is used to no other of the prophets but to Ezekiel all along. We may take it, 1. As a humble diminishing title. Lest Ezekiel should be lifted up with the abundance of the revelations, he is put in mind of this, that still he is a *son of man*, a mean, weak, mortal creature. Among other things made known to him, it was necessary he should be made to know this, that he was a *son of man*, and therefore that it was wonderful condescension in God that he was pleased thus to manifest himself to him. Now he is among the living creatures, the angels; yet he must remember that he is himself a man, a dying creature. *What is man, or the son of man*, that he should be thus visited, thus dignified? Though God had here a splendid retinue of holy angels about his throne, who were ready to go on his errands, yet he passes them all by, and pitches on Ezekiel, a *son of man*, to be his messenger to the house of Israel; for we have this treasure in earthen vessels, and God's messages sent us by men like ourselves, whose terror shall not make us afraid nor their hand be heavy upon us. Ezekiel was a priest, but the priesthood was brought low and the honour of it laid in the dust. It therefore became him, and all of his order, to humble themselves, and to lie low, as sons of men, common men. He was now to be employed as a prophet, God's ambassador, and a ruler over the kingdoms (Jer. i. 10), a post of great honour, but he must remember that he is a *son of man*, and, whatever good he did, it was not by any might of his own, for he was a *son of man*, but in the strength of divine grace, which must therefore have all the glory. Or, 2. We may take it as an honourable

dignifying title; for it is one of the titles of the Messiah in the Old Testament (Dan. vii. 13, *I saw one like the Son of man come with the clouds of heaven*), whence Christ borrows the title he often calls himself by, *The Son of man*. The prophets were types of him, as they had near access to God and great authority among men; and therefore as David the king is called the *Lord's anointed*, or *Christ*, so Ezekiel the prophet is called *son of man*.

I. Ezekiel is here set up, and made to stand, that he might receive his commission, v. 1, 2. He is set up,

1. By a divine command: *Son of man, stand upon thy feet*. His lying prostrate was a posture of greater reverence, but his standing up would be a posture of greater readiness and fitness for business. Our adorings of God must not hinder, but rather quicken and excite, our actings for God. He *fell on his face* in a holy fear and awe of God, but he was quickly raised up again; for those that *humble themselves shall be exalted*. God delights not in the dejections of his servants, but the same that brings them low will raise them up; the same that is a Spirit of bondage will be a Spirit of adoption. *Stand, and I will speak to thee*. Note, We may expect that God will speak to us when we stand ready to do what he commands us.

2. By a divine power going along with that command, v. 2. God bade him *stand up*; but, because he had not strength of his own to recover his feet nor courage to face the vision, *the Spirit entered into him and set him upon his feet*. Note, God is graciously pleased to work that in us which he requires of us and raises those whom he bids rise. We must stir up ourselves, and then God will put strength into us; we must *work out our salvation*, and then God will *work in us*. He observed that the Spirit entered into him when Christ spoke to him; for Christ conveys his Spirit by his word as the ordinary means and makes the word effectual by the Spirit. *The Spirit set the prophet upon his feet*, to raise him up from his dejections, for *he is the Comforter*. Thus, in a similar case, Daniel was strengthened by a divine touch (Dan. x. 18) and John was raised by the right hand of Christ laid upon him, Rev. i. 17. *The Spirit set him upon his feet*, made him willing and forward to do as he was bidden, and then he *heard him that spoke to him*. He heard the voice before (ch. i. 28), but now he heard it more distinctly and clearly, heard it and submitted to it. The Spirit sets us upon our feet by inclining our will to our duty, and thereby disposes the understanding to receive the knowledge of it.

II. Ezekiel is here sent, and made to go, with a message to the children of Israel (v. 3): *I send thee to the children of Israel*. God had for many ages been sending to



them his servants the prophets, rising up botimes and sending them, but to little purpose; they were now sent into captivity for abusing God's messengers, and yet even there God sends this prophet among them, to try if their ears were open to discipline, now that they were holden in the cords of affliction. As the supports of life, so the means of grace, are continued to us after they have been a thousand times forfeited. Now observe,

1. The rebellion of the people to whom this ambassador is sent; he is sent to reduce them to their allegiance, to bring back the children of Israel to the Lord their God. Let the prophet know that there is occasion for his going on this errand, for they are a *rebellious nation* (v. 3), a *rebellious house*, v. 5. They are called *children of Israel*; they retain the name of their pious ancestors, but they have wretchedly degenerated, they have become *Goiim*—*nations*, the word commonly used for the Gentiles. The *children of Israel* have become as the *children of the Ethiopian* (Amos ix. 7), for they are *rebellious*; and rebels at home are much more provoking to a prince than enemies abroad. Their idolatries and false worships were the sins which, more than any thing, denominated them a *rebellious nation*; for thereby they set up another prince in opposition to their rightful Sovereign, and did homage and paid tribute to the usurper, which is the highest degree of rebellion that can be. (1.) They had been all along a rebellious generation and had persisted in their rebellion: *They and their fathers have transgressed against me*. Note, Those are not always in the right that have antiquity and the fathers on their side; for there are errors and corruptions of long standing: and it is so far from being an excuse for walking in a bad way that our fathers walked in it that it is really an aggravation, for it is justifying the sin of those that have gone before us. They have continued in their rebellion *even unto this very day*; notwithstanding the various means and methods that have been made use of to reclaim them, *to this day*, when they are under divine rebukes for their rebellion, they continue *rebellious*; many among them, like Ahaz, even *in their distress, trespass yet more*; they are not the better for all the changes that have befallen them, but still remain unchanged. (2.) They were now hardened in their rebellion. They are *impudent children*, brazen-faced, and cannot blush; they are stiff-hearted, self-willed, and cannot bend, cannot stoop, neither ashamed nor afraid to sin; they will not be wrought upon by the sense either of honour or duty. We are willing to hope this was not the character of all, but of many, and those perhaps the leading men. Observe, [1.] God knew this concerning them, how inflexible, how incorrigible, they were. Note, God is perfectly

acquainted with every man's true character, whatever his pretensions and professions may be. [2.] He told the prophet this, that he might know the better how to deal with them and what handle to take them by. He must rebuke such men as those sharply, cuttingly, must deal plainly with them, though they call it *dealing roughly*. God tells him this, that it might be no surprise or stumbling-block to him if he found that his preaching should not make that impression upon them, which he had reason to think it would.

2. The dominion of the prince by whom this ambassador is sent. (1.) He has authority to command him whom he sends. *"I do send thee unto them, and therefore thou shalt say thus and thus unto them,"* v. 4. Note, It is the prerogative of Christ to send prophets and ministers and to enjoin them their work. St. Paul thanked Christ Jesus who put him into the ministry (1 Tim. i. 12); for, as he was sent of the Father, ministers are sent by him; and as he received the Spirit without measure he gives the Spirit by measure, saying, *Receive you the Holy Ghost*. They are *impudent and rebellious*, and yet *I send thee unto them*. Note, Christ gives the means of grace to many who he knows will not make a good use of those means, puts many a price into the hand of fools to get wisdom, who not only have no heart to it, but have their hearts turned against it. Thus he will magnify his own grace, justify his own judgment, leave them inexcusable, and make their condemnation more intolerable. (2.) He has authority by him to command those to whom he sends him: *Thou shalt say unto them. Thus saith the Lord God*. All he said to them must be spoken in God's name, enforced by his authority, and delivered as from him. Christ delivered his doctrines as a Son—*Verily, verily, I say unto you*; the prophets as *servants*—*Thus saith the Lord God*, our Master and yours. Note, The writings of the prophets are the word of God, and so are to be regarded by every one of us. (3.) He has authority to call those to an account to whom he sends his ambassadors. *Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear*, whether they will attend to the word or turn their backs upon it, *they shall know that there has been a prophet among them*, shall know by experience. [1.] If they hear and obey, they will know by comfortable experience that the word which did them good was brought to them by one that had a commission from God and a divine power going along with him in the execution of it. Thus those who were converted by St. Paul's preaching are said to be *the seals of his apostleship*, 1 Cor. ix. 2. When men's hearts are made to burn under the word, and their wills to bow to it, then they know and bear the witness in themselves that it is not the *word of men, but of God*.

[2.] If they forbear, if they turn a deaf ear to the word (as it is to be feared they will, *for they are a rebellious house*), yet they shall be made to know that he whom they slighted was indeed a prophet, by the reproaches of their own consciences and the just judgments of God upon them for refusing him; they shall know it to their cost, know it to their confusion, know it by sad experience, what a pernicious dangerous thing it is to despise God's messengers. They shall know by the accomplishment of the threatenings that the prophet who denounced them was sent of God; thus the word will *take hold of men*, Zech. i. 6. Note, *First*, Those to whom the word of God is sent are upon their trial *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear*, and accordingly will their doom be. *Secondly*, Whether we be edified by the word or no, it is certain that God will be glorified and his word magnified and made honourable. Whether it be a *savour of life unto life or of death unto death*, either way it will appear to be of divine original.

6 And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. 7 And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they *are* most rebellious. 8 But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. 9 And when I looked, behold, a hand *was* sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book *was* therein; 10 And he spread it before me: and it *was* written within and without: and *there was* written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

The prophet, having received his commission, here receives a charge with it. It is a post of honour to which he is advanced, but withal it is a post of service and work, and it is here required of him,

I. That he be bold. He must act in the discharge of this trust with an undaunted courage and resolution, and not be either driven off from his work or made to drive on heavily, by the difficulties and oppositions that he would be likely to meet with in it: *Son of man, be not afraid of them*, v. 6. Note, Those that will do any thing to purpose in the service of God must not be

afraid of the face of man; for the fear of men will bring a snare, which will be very entangling to us in the work of God. 1. God tells the prophet what was the character of those to whom he sent him, as before, v. 3, 4. They are *briers and thorns*, scratching, and tearing, and vexing a man, which way soever he turns. They are continually teasing God's prophets and entangling them in their talk (Matt. xxii. 15); they are *pricking briers and grieving thorns*. The best of them is as a brier, and *the most upright sharper than a thorn-hedge*, Mic. vii. 4. Thorns and briers are the fruit of sin and the curse, and of equal date with the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Note, Wicked men, especially the persecutors of God's prophets and people, are as briers and thorns, which are hurtful to the ground, choke the good seed, hinder God's husbandry, are vexatious to his husbandmen; but they are *nigh unto cursing and their end is to be burned*. Yet God makes use of them sometimes for the correction and instruction of his people, as *Gideon taught the men of Succoth with thorns and briers*, Judg. viii. 16. Yet this is not the worst of their character: they are *scorpions*, venomous and malignant. The sting of a scorpion is a thousand times more hurtful than the scratch of a brier. Persecutors are a *generation of vipers*, are of the serpent's seed, and the *poison of asps is under their tongue*; and they are *more subtle than any beast of the field*. And, which makes the prophet's case the more grievous, he dwells among these scorpions; they are continually about him, so that he cannot be safe nor quiet in his own house; these bad men are his bad neighbours, who thereby have many opportunities, and will let slip none, to do him a mischief. God takes notice of this to the prophet, as Christ to the angel of one of the churches, Rev. ii. 13. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is*. Ezekiel had been, in vision, conversing with angels, but when he comes down from this mount he finds he *dwells with scorpions*. 2. He tells him what would be their conduct towards him, that they would do what they could to frighten him with *their looks and their words*; they would hector him and threaten him, would look scornfully and spitefully at him, and do their utmost to face him down and put him out of countenance, that they might drive him off from being a prophet, or at least from telling them of their faults and threatening them with the judgments of God; or, if they could not prevail in this, that they might vex and perplex him, and disturb the repose of his mind. They were now themselves in subjection, divested of all power, so that they had no other way of persecuting the prophet than with *their looks and their words*; and so they did persecute him. *Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil*



things as thou couldst, Jer. iii. 5. If they had had more power, they would have done more mischief. They were now in captivity, smarting for their rebellion, and particularly their misusing God's prophets; and yet they are as bad as ever. *Though thou bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his foolishness depart from him*; no providences will of themselves humble and reform men, unless the grace of God work with them. But, how malicious soever they were, Ezekiel must not be afraid of them nor dismayed, he must not be deterred from his work, or any part of it, nor be disheartened or dispirited in it by all their menaces, but go on in it with resolution and cheerfulness, assuring himself of safety under the divine protection.

II. It is required that he be faithful, v. 7. 1. He must be faithful to Christ who sent him: *Thou shalt speak my words unto them*. Note, As it is the honour of prophets that they are entrusted to speak God's words, so it is their duty to cleave closely to them and to speak nothing but what is agreeable to the words of God. Ministers must always speak according to that rule. 2. He must be faithful to the souls of those to whom he was sent: *Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear*, he must deliver his message to them as he received it. He must bring them to comply with the word, and not study to accommodate the word to their humours. "It is true they are most rebellious, they are rebellion itself; but, however, speak my words to them, whether they are pleasing or displeasing." Note, The untractableness and unprofitableness of people under the word are no good reason why ministers should leave off preaching to them; nor must we decline an opportunity by which good may be done, though we have a great deal of reason to think no good will be done.

III. It is required that he be observant of his instructions.

1. Here is a general intimation what the instructions were that were given him, in the contents of the book which was spread before him, v. 10. (1.) His instructions were large; for the roll was written within and without, on the inside and on the outside of the roll. It was as a sheet of paper written on all the four sides. One side contained their sins; the other side contained the judgments of God coming upon them for those sins. Note, God has a great deal to say to his people when they have degenerated and become rebellious. (2.) His instructions were melancholy. He was sent on a sad errand; the matter contained in the book was, *lamentations, and mourning, and woe*. The idea of his message is taken from the impression it would make upon the minds of those that carefully attended to it; it would set them a weeping and crying out, *Woe! and, Alas!* Both the discoveries of sin and the denunciations of wrath would

be matter of lamentation. What could be more lamentable, more mournful, more woe-ful, than to see a holy happy people sunk into such a state of sin and misery as it appears by the prophecy of this book the Jews were at this time? Ezekiel echoes to Jeremiah's lamentations. Note, Though God is rich in mercy, yet impenitent sinners will find there are even among his words *lamentations and woe*.

2. Here is an express charge given to the prophet to observe his instructions, both in receiving his message and delivering it. He is now to receive it and is here commanded, (1.) To attend diligently to it: *Son of man, hear what I say unto thee, v. 8*. Note, Those that speak from God to others must be sure to hear from God themselves and be obedient to his voice: "*Be not thou rebellious*; do not refuse to go on this errand, or to deliver it; do not fly off, as Jonah did, for fear of disobliging thy countrymen. They are a rebellious house, among whom thou livest; but be not thou like them, do not comply with them in any thing that is evil. If ministers, who are reprovers by office, connive at sin and indulge sinners, either show them not their wickedness or show them not the fatal consequences of it, for fear of displeasing them and getting their ill-will, they hereby make themselves partakers of their guilt and are rebellious like them. If people will not do their duty in reforming, yet let ministers do theirs in reproving, and they will have the comfort of it in the reflection, whatever the success be, as that prophet had, Isa. 1. 5. *The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious*. Even the best of men, when their lot is cast in bad times and places, have need to be cautioned against the worst of crimes. (2.) To digest it in his own mind by an experience of the favour and power of it: "*Do not only hear what I say unto thee, but open thy mouth, and eat that which I give thee*. Prepare to eat it, and eat it willingly and with an appetite." All God's children are content to be at their heavenly Father's finding, and to eat whatever he gives them. That which God's hand reached out to Ezekiel was a roll of a book, or the volume of a book, a book or scroll of paper or parchment fully written and rolled up. Divine revelation comes to us from the hand of Christ; he gave it to the prophets, Rev. i. 1. When we look at the roll of the book we must have an eye to the hand by which it is sent to us. He that brought it to the prophet spread it before him, that he might not swallow it with an implicit faith, but might fully understand the contents of it, and then receive it and make it his own. *Be not rebellious*, says Christ, but *eat what I give thee*. If we receive not what Christ in his ordinances and providences allots for us, if we submit not to his word and rod, and reconcile not ourselves to both, we shall be accounted rebellious.

## CHAP. III.

In this chapter we have the further preparation of the prophet for the work to which God called him. 1. His eating the roll that was presented to him in the close of the foregoing chapter, ver. 1—3. 11. Further instructions and encouragements given him to the same purport with those in the foregoing chapter, ver. 4—11. 111. The mighty impulse he was under, with which he was carried to those that were to be his hearers, ver. 12—15. IV. A further explication of his office and business as a prophet, under the similitude of a watchman, ver. 16—21. V. The restraining and restoring of the prophet's liberty of speech, as God pleased, ver. 22—27.

**M**OREOVER he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. 2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. 4 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. 5 For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; 6 Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. 7 But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. 8 Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. 9 As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. 10 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. 11 And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. 12 Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. 13 I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one

another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. 14 So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. 15 Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days.

These verses are fitly joined by some translators to the foregoing chapter, as being of a piece with it and a continuation of the same vision. The prophets received the word from God that they might deliver it to the people of God, furnished themselves that they might furnish them with the knowledge of the mind and will of God. Now here the prophet is taught,

I. How he must receive divine revelation himself, v. 1. Christ (whom he saw upon the throne, ch. i. 26) said to him, "*Son of man, eat this roll*, admit this revelation into thy understanding, take it, take the meaning of it, understand it aright, admit it into thy heart, apply it, and be affected with it; imprint it in thy mind, ruminate and chew the cud upon it; take it as it is entire, and make no difficulty of it, nay, take a pleasure in it as thou dost in thy meat, and let thy soul be nourished and strengthened by it; let it be meat and drink to thee, and as thy necessary food; be full of it, as thou art of the meat thou hast eaten." Thus ministers should in their studies and meditations take in that word of God which they are to preach to others. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them*, Jer. xv. 16. They must be both well acquainted and much affected with the things of God, that they may speak of them both clearly and warmly, with a great deal of divine light and heat. Now observe, 1. How this command is inculcated upon the prophet. In the foregoing chapter, *Eat what I give thee*; and here (v. 1), "*Eat that thou findest*, that which is presented to thee by the hand of Christ." Note, Whatever we find to be the word of God, whatever is brought to us by him who is the Word of God, we must receive it without disputing. What we find set before us in the scripture, that we must eat. And again (v. 3), "*Cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll*"; do not eat it and bring it up again, as that which is nauseous, but eat it and retain it, as that which is nourishing and grateful to the stomach. Feast upon this vision till thou be full of matter, as Elihu was, Job xxxii. 18. Let the word have a place in thee, the innermost place." We must take pains with our own hearts, that we may cause them duly to receive and entertain the word of God, that every faculty



may do its office, in order to the due digesting of the word of God, that it may be turned in *succum et sanguinem*—into blood and spirits. We must empty ourselves of worldly things, that we may fill our bowels with this roll. 2. How this command is explained (v. 10): “*All my words that I shall speak unto thee, to be spoken unto the people, thou must receive in thy heart, as well as hear with thy ears, receive them in the love of them.*” Let these sayings sink down into your ears, Luke ix. 44. Christ demands the prophet’s attention not only to what he now says, but to all that he shall at any time hereafter speak: *Receive it all in thy heart; meditate on these things and give thyself wholly to them*, 1 Tim. iv. 15. 3. How this command was obeyed in vision. He opened his mouth and Christ caused him to eat the roll, v. 2. If we be truly willing to receive the word into our hearts, Christ will by his Spirit bring it into them and cause it to dwell in us richly. If he that opens the roll, and by his Spirit, as a Spirit of revelation, spreads it before us, did not also open our understanding, and by his Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom, give us the knowledge of it and cause us to eat it, we should be for ever strangers to it. The prophet had reason to fear that the roll would be an unpleasant morsel and a sorry dish to make a meal of, but it proved to be in his mouth as honey for sweetness. Note, If we readily obey even the most difficult commands, we shall find that comfort in the reflection which will make us abundant amends for all the hardships we meet with in the way of our duty. Though the roll was filled with lamentations, and mourning, and woe, yet it was to the prophet as honey for sweetness. Note, Gracious souls can receive those truths of God with great delight which speak most terror to wicked people. We find St. John let into some part of the revelation by such a sign as this, Rev. x. 9, 10. He took the book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up, and it was, as this, in his mouth sweet as honey; but it was bitter in the belly; and we shall find that this was so too, for (v. 14) the prophet went in bitterness.

II. How he must deliver that divine revelation to others which he himself had received (v. 1): *Eat this roll, and then go, speak to the house of Israel.* He must not undertake to preach the things of God to others till he did himself fully understand them; let him not go without his errand, nor take it by the halves. But when he does himself fully understand them he must be both busy and bold to preach them for the good of others. We must not conceal the words of the Holy One (Job vi. 10), for that is burying a talent which was given us to trade with. He must go and speak to the house of Israel; for it is their privilege to have God’s statutes and judgments made known to them; as the giving of the law

(the lively oracles), so prophecy (the living oracle) pertains to them. He is not sent to the Chaldeans to reprove them for their sins, but to the house of Israel to reprove them for theirs; for the father corrects his own child if he do amiss, not the child of a stranger.

1. The instructions given him in speaking to them are much the same with those in the foregoing chapter.

(1.) He must speak to them all that, and that only, which God spoke to him. He had said before (ch. ii. 7): *Thou shalt speak my words to them*; here he says (v. 4), *Thou shalt speak with my words unto them, or in my words.* He must not only say that which for substance is the same that God had said to him, but as near as may be in the same language and expressions. Blessed Paul, though a man of a very happy invention, yet speaks of the things of God in the words which the Holy Ghost teaches, 1 Cor. ii. 13. Scripture truths look best in scripture language, their native dress; and how can we better speak God’s mind than with his words?

(2.) He must remember that they are the house of Israel whom he is sent to speak to, God’s house and his own; and therefore such as he ought to have a particular concern for and to deal faithfully and tenderly with. They were such as he had an intimate acquaintance with, being not only their countryman, but their companion in tribulation; they and he were fellow-sufferers, and had lately been fellow-travellers, in very melancholy circumstances, from Judea to Babylon, and had often mingled their tears, which could not but knit their affections to each other. It was well for the people that they had a prophet who knew experimentally how to sympathize with them, and could not but be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. It was well for the prophet that he had to do with those of his own nation, not with a people of strange speech and a hard language, deep of lip, so that thou canst not fathom their meaning, and heavy of tongue, whom it is intolerable and impossible to converse with. Every strange language seems to us to be deep and heavy. “Thou art not sent to many such people, whom thou couldst neither speak to nor hear from, neither understand nor be understood among but by an interpreter.” The apostles indeed were sent to many people of a strange speech, but they could not have done any good among them if they had not had the gift of tongues; but Ezekiel was sent only to one people, those but a few, and his own, whom having acquaintance with he might hope to find acceptance with.

(3.) He must remember what God had already told him of the bad character of those to whom he was sent, that, if he met with discouragement and disappointment in them, he might not be offended. They are

*impudent and hard-hearted* (v. 7), no convictions of sin would make them blush, no denunciations of wrath would make them tremble. Two things aggravated their obstinacy:—[1.] That they were more obstinate than their neighbours would have been if the prophet had been sent to them. Had God sent him to any other people, though of a *strange speech, surely they would have hearkened to him*; they would at least have given him a patient hearing and shown him that respect which he could not obtain of his own countrymen. The Ninevites were wrought upon by Jonah's preaching when the house of Israel, that was compassed about with so great a cloud of prophets, was unhumiliated and unreformed. But what shall we say to these things? The means of grace are given to those that will not improve them and withheld from those that would have improved them. We must resolve this into the divine sovereignty, and say, *Lord, thy judgments are a great deep*. [2.] That they were obstinate against God himself: "*They will not hearken unto thee, and no marvel, for they will not hearken unto me;*" they will not regard the word of the prophet, for they will not regard the rod of God, by which the *Lord's voice cries in the city*. If they believe not God speaking to them by a minister, neither would they believe though he should speak to them by a *voice from heaven*; nay, *therefore* they reject what the prophet says, because it comes from God, whom the *carnal mind is enmity to*. They are prejudiced against the law of God, and for that reason turn a deaf ear to his prophets, whose business it is to enforce his law.

(4.) He must resolve to put on courage, and Christ promises to steel him with it, v. 8, 9. He is sent to such as *are impudent and hard-hearted*, who will receive no impressions nor be wrought upon either by fair means or foul, who will take a pride in affronting God's messenger and confronting the message. It will be a hard task to know how to deal with them; but, [1.] God will enable him to put a good face on it: "*I have made thy face strong against their faces, endued thee with all the firmness and boldness that the case calls for.*" Perhaps Ezekiel was naturally bashful and timorous, but, if God did not find him fit, yet by his grace he made him fit, to encounter the greatest difficulties. Note, The more impudent wicked people are in their opposition to religion the more openly and resolutely should God's people appear in the practice and defence of it. Let the *innocent stir up himself against the hypocrite*, Job xvii. 8. When vice is daring let not virtue be sneaking. And, when God has work to do, he will animate men for it and give them strength according to the day. If there be occasion, God can and will by his grace make the *foreheads of faithful ministers as an ada-*

*mant*, so that the most threatening powers shall not dash them out of countenance. *The Lord God will help me, therefore have I set my face like a flint*, Isa. i. 7. [2.] He is therefore commanded to have a good heart on it, and to go on in his work with a holy security, not valuing either the censures or the threats of his enemies: "*Fear not, neither be dismayed at their looks*; let not the menaces of their impotent malice cast either a damp upon thee or a stumbling-block before thee." Bold sinners must have bold reprovers; *evil beasts must be rebuked cuttingly* (Tit. i. 12, 13), must be *saved with fear*, Jude 23. Those that keep closely to the service of God may be sure of the favour of God, and then they need not be dismayed at the proud looks of men. Let not the angry countenance that drives away a backbiting tongue give any check to a reproving tongue.

(5.) He must continue instant with them in his preaching, whatever the success was, v. 11. He must *go to those of the captivity*, who, being in affliction, it was to be hoped would receive instruction; he must look upon them as *the children of his people*, to whom he was nearly allied, and for whom he therefore ought to have a very tender concern, as Paul for his kinsmen, Rom. ix. 3. And he must *tell them* not only what the Lord said, but that the Lord said it; let him speak in God's name, and back what he said with his authority: *Thus saith the Lord God; tell them so, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear*. Not that it may be indifferent to us what success our ministry has, but, whatever it be, we must go on with our work and leave the issue to God. We must not say "Here are some so good that we do not need to speak to them," or, "Here are others so bad that it is to no purpose to speak to them;" but, however it be, deliver thy message faithfully, *tell them, The Lord God saith so and so*, let them reject it at their peril.

2. Full instructions being thus given to the prophet, pursuant to his commission, we are here told,

(1.) With what satisfaction this mission of his was applauded by the holy angels, who were very well pleased to see one of a nature inferior to their own thus honourably employed and entrusted. He *heard a voice of a great rushing* (v. 12), as if the angels thronged and crowded to see the inauguration of a prophet; for to them *is known by the church* (that is, by reflection from the church) *the manifold wisdom of God*, Eph. iii. 10. They seemed to strive who should get nearest to this great sight. He *heard the noise of their wings that touched*, or (as the word is) *kissed one another*, denoting the mutual affections and assistances of the angels. He heard also *the noise of the wheels of Providence moving over-against the angels and in concert with them*. All this



was to engage his attention and to convince him that the God who sent him, having such a glorious train of attendants, no doubt had power sufficient to bear him out in his work. But all this noise ended in the voice of praise. He heard them saying, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place.* [1.] From heaven, his place above, whence his glory was now in vision descending, or whither perhaps it was now returning. Let the innumerable company of angels above join with those employed in this vision in saying, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord. Praise you the Lord from the heavens. Praise him, all his angels,* Ps. cxlviii. 1, 2. [2.] From the temple, his place on earth, whence his glory was now departing. They lament the departure of the glory, but adore the righteousness of God in it: however it be, yet God is blessed and glorious, and ever will be so. The prophet Isaiah heard God thus praised when he received his commission (Isa. vi. 3); and a comfort it is to all the faithful servants of God, when they see how much God is dishonoured in this lower world, to think how much he is admired and glorified in the upper world. *The glory of the Lord* has many slights from our place, but many praises from his place.

(2.) With what reluctance of his own spirit, and yet with what a mighty efficacy of the Spirit of God, the prophet was himself brought to the execution of his office. *The grace given to him was not in vain*; for, [1.] The Spirit led him with a strong hand. God bade him go, but he stirred not till the Spirit took him up. *The Spirit of the living creatures* that was in the wheels now was in the prophet too, and took him up, first to hear more distinctly the acclamations of the angels (v. 12), but afterwards (v. 14) *lifted him up, and took him away* to his work, which he was backward to, being very loth either to bring trouble upon himself or foretell it to his people. He would gladly have been excused, but must own, as another prophet does (Jer. xx. 7), *Thou wast stronger than I, and hast prevailed.* Ezekiel would willingly have kept all he heard and saw to himself, that it might go no further, but the hand of the Lord was strong upon him and overpowered him; he was carried on contrary to his own inclinations by the prophetic impulse, so that he could not but speak the things which he had heard and seen, as the apostles, Acts iv. 20. Note, Those whom God calls to the ministry, as he furnishes their heads for it, so he bows their hearts to it. [2.] He followed with a sad heart: *The Spirit took me away, says he, and then I went, but it was in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit.* He had perhaps seen what a hard task Jeremiah had at Jerusalem when he appeared as a prophet, what pains he took, what opposition he met with, how he was abused by hand and tongue, and what ill treatment he met with, and all to

no purpose. "And" (thinks Ezekiel) "must I be set up for a mark like him?" The life of a captive was bad enough; but what would the life of a prophet in captivity be? Therefore he went in this fret and under this discomposure. Note, There may in some cases be a great reluctance of corruption even where there is a manifest predominance of grace. "*I went, not disobedient to the heavenly vision, or shrinking from the work, as Jonah, but I went in bitterness, not at all pleased with it.*" When he received the divine revelation himself, it was to him *sweet as honey* (v. 3); he could with abundance of pleasure have spent all his days in meditating upon it; but when he is to preach it to others, who, he foresees, will be hardened and exasperated by it, and have their condemnation aggravated, then he goes in bitterness. Note, It is a great grief to faithful ministers, and makes them go on in their work with a heavy heart, when they find people untractable and hating to be reformed. He went in the heat of his spirit, because of the discouragements he foresaw he should meet with; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon him, not only to compel him to his work, but to fit him for it, to carry him through it, and animate him against the difficulties he would meet with (so we may understand it); and, when he found it so, he was better reconciled to his business and applied himself to it: *Then he came to those of the captivity* (v. 15), to some place where there were many of them together, and sat where they sat, working, or reading, or talking, and continued among them seven days to hear what they said and observe what they did; and all that time he was waiting for the word of the Lord to come to him. Note, Those that would speak suitably and profitably to people about their souls must acquaint themselves with them and with their case, must do as Ezekiel did here, must sit where they sit, and speak familiarly to them of the things of God, and put themselves into their condition, yea, though they sit by the rivers of Babylon. But observe, He was there astonished, overwhelmed with grief for the sins and miseries of his people and overpowered by the pomp of the vision he had seen. He was there desolate (so some read it); God showed him no visions, men made him no visits. Thus was he left to digest his grief, and come to a better temper, before the word of the Lord should come to him. Note, Those whom God designs to exalt and enlarge he first humbles and straitens for a time.

16 And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth and give

them warning from me. 18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. 20 Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 21 Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.

These further instructions God gave to the prophet at *the end of seven days*, that is, on the seventh day after the vision he had; and it is very probable that both that and this were on the sabbath day, which *the house of Israel*, even in their captivity, observed as well as they could in those circumstances. We do not find that their conquerors and oppressors tied them to any constant service, as their Egyptian taskmasters had formerly done, but that they might observe the sabbath-rest for a sign to distinguish between them and their neighbours; but for the sabbath-work they had not the convenience of temple or synagogue, only it should seem they had a *place by the river side where prayer was wont to be made* (as Acts xvi. 13); there they met on the sabbath day; there their enemies upbraided them with the *songs of Zion* (Ps. cxxvii. 1, 3); there Ezekiel met them, and *the word of the Lord* then and there came to him. He that had been musing and meditating on the things of God all the week was fit to speak to the people in God's name on the sabbath day, and disposed to hear God speak to him. This sabbath day Ezekiel was not so honoured with visions of the glory of God as he had been the sabbath before; but he is plainly, and by a very common similitude, told his duty, which he is to communicate to the people. Note, Raptures and transports of joy are not the daily bread of God's children, however they may upon special occasions be feasted with

them. We must not deny but that we have truly communion with God (1 John 1. 3) though we have it not always so sensibly as at some times. And, though the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven may sometimes be looked into, yet ordinarily it is plain preaching that is most for edification. God here tells the prophet what his office was, and what the duty of that office; and this (we may suppose) he was to tell the people, that they might attend to what he said and improve it accordingly. Note, It is good for people to know and consider what a charge their ministers have of them and what an account they must shortly give of that charge. Observe,

I. What the office is to which the prophet is called: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel*, v. 17. The vision he saw astonished him: he knew not what to make of that, and therefore God used this plain comparison, which served better to lead him to the understanding of his work and so to reconcile him to it. He sat among the captives, and said little, but God comes to him, and tells him that will not do; he is *a watchman*, and has something to say to them; he is appointed to be as *a watchman* in the city, to guard against fire, robbers, and disturbers of the peace, as *a watchman* over the flock, to guard against thieves and beasts of prey, but especially as *a watchman* in the camp, in an invaded country or a besieged town, that is to watch the motions of the enemy, and to sound an alarm upon the approach, nay, upon the first appearance, of danger. This supposes *the house of Israel* to be in a military state, and exposed to enemies, who are subtle and restless in their attempts upon it; yea, and each of the particular members of that house to be in danger and concerned to stand upon their guard. Note, Ministers are *watchmen on the church's walls* (Isa. lxii. 6), *watchmen that go about the city*, Cant. iii. 3. It is a toilsome office. Watchmen must keep awake, be they ever so sleepy, and keep abroad, be it ever so cold; they must stand all weathers *upon the watch-tower*, Isa. xxi. 8; Gen. xxxi. 40. It is a dangerous office. Sometimes they cannot keep their post, but are in peril of death from the enemy, who gain their point if they kill the sentinel; and yet they dare not quit their post upon pain of death from their general. Such a dilemma are the church's watchmen in; men will curse them if they be faithful, and God will curse them if they be false. But it is a needful office; *the house of Israel* cannot be safe without watchmen, and yet, *except the Lord keep it, the watchman waketh but in vain*, Ps. cxxvii. 1, 2.

II. What is the duty of this office. The work of a watchman is to take notice and to give notice.

1. The prophet, as a watchman, must



take notice of what God said concerning this people, not only concerning the body of the people, to which the prophecies of Jeremiah and other prophets had most commonly reference, but concerning particular persons, according as their character was. He must not, as other watchmen, look round to spy danger and gain intelligence, but he must look up to God, and further he need not look: *Hear the word at my mouth, v. 17.* Note, Those that are to preach must first hear; for how can those teach others who have not first learned themselves?

2. He must give notice of what he heard. As a watchman must have eyes in his head, so he must have a tongue in his head; if he be dumb, it is as bad as if he were blind, Isa. lvi. 10. Thou shalt *give them warning from me*, sound an alarm in the *holy mountain*; not in his own name, or as from himself, but in God's name, and from him. Ministers are God's mouth to the children of men. The scriptures are written for our admonition. *By them is thy servant warned*, Ps. xix. 11. But, because that which is delivered *vivâ voce*—by the living voice, commonly makes the deepest impression, God is pleased, by men like ourselves, who are equally concerned, to enforce upon us the warnings of the written word. Now the prophet, in his preaching, must distinguish between the wicked and the righteous, the precious and the vile, and in his applications must suit his alarms to each, giving every one his portion; and, if he did this, he should have the comfort of it, whatever the success was, but, if not, he was accountable.

(1.) Some of those he had to do with were wicked, and he must warn them not to go on in their wickedness, but to turn from it, v. 18, 19. We may observe here, [1.] That the God of heaven has said, and does say, to every wicked man, that if he go on still in his trespasses he *shall surely die*. His iniquity shall undoubtedly be his ruin; it tends to ruin and will end in ruin. *Dying thou shalt die, thou shalt die* so great a death, *shalt die* eternally, be ever dying, but never dead. *The wicked man shall die in his iniquity, shall die* under the guilt of it, *die* under the dominion of it. [2.] That if a *wicked man turn from his wickedness, and from his wicked way, he shall live*, and the ruin he is threatened with shall be prevented; and, that he may do so, he is warned of the danger he is in. *The wicked man shall die* if he go on, but *shall live* if he repent. Observe, He is to turn *from his wickedness and from his wicked way*. It is not enough for a man to turn *from his wicked way* by an outward reformation, which may be the effect of his sins leaving him rather than of his leaving his sins, but he must *turn from his wickedness*, from the love of it and the inclination to it, by an inward regeneration; if he do not so much as turn *from his wicked way*, there is little hope that

he will turn *from his wickedness*. [3.] That it is the duty of ministers both to warn sinners of the danger of sin and to assure them of the benefit of repentance, to set before them how miserable they are if they go on in sin, and how happy they may be if they will but repent and reform. Note, The ministry of the word is concerning matters of *life and death*, for those are the things it sets before us, *the blessing and the curse*, that we may escape the curse and inherit the blessing. [4.] That, though ministers do not warn wicked people as they ought of their misery and danger, yet that shall not be admitted as an excuse for those that go on still in their trespasses; for, though the watchman did not *give them warning*, yet *they shall die in their iniquity*, for they had sufficient warning given them by the providence of God and their own consciences; and, if they would have taken it, they might have *saved their lives*. [5.] That if ministers be not faithful to their trust, if they do not warn sinners of the fatal consequences of sin, but suffer them to go on unrepented, the *blood* of those that perish through their carelessness *will be required at their hand*. It shall be charged upon them in the day of account that it was owing to their unfaithfulness that such and such precious souls perished in sin; for who knows but if they had had fair warning given them they might have fled in time *from the wrath to come*? And, if it contract so heinous a guilt as it does to be accessory to the murder of a dying body, what is it to be accessory to the ruin of an immortal soul? [6.] That if ministers do their duty in giving warning to sinners, though the warning be not taken, yet they may have this satisfaction, that they are *clear from their blood*, and have *delivered their own souls*, though they cannot prevail to deliver theirs. Those that are faithful shall have their reward, though they be not successful.

(2.) Some of those he had to deal with were *righteous*, at least he had reason to think, in a judgment of charity, that they were so; and he must warn them not to apostatize and *turn away from their righteousness*, v. 20, 21. We may observe here, [1.] That the best men in the world have need to be warned against apostasy, and to be told of the danger they are in of it and the danger they are in by it. God's servants must be warned (Ps. xix. 11) that they do not neglect his work and quit his service. One good means to keep us from falling is to keep up a holy fear of falling, Heb. iv. 1. *Let us therefore fear*; and (Rom. xi. 20) even those that *stand by faith* must *not be high-minded, but fear*, and must therefore be warned. [2.] There is a *righteousness* which a man may *turn from*, a seeming *righteousness*, and, if men turn from this, it thereby appears that it was never sincere, how passable, nay, how plausible soever it was; for, *if they had been of us, they would no doubt*

*have continued with us*, 1 John ii. 19. There are many that *begin in the spirit*, but *end in the flesh*, that set their faces heavenward, but look back; that had a first love, but have lost it, and *turned from the holy commandment*. [3.] When men *turn from their righteousness* they soon learn to commit iniquity. When they grow careless and remiss in the duties of God's worship, neglect them, or are negligent in them, they become an easy prey to the tempter. Omisions make way for commissions. [4.] *When men turn from their righteousness, and commit iniquity*, it is just with God to lay *stumbling-blocks before them*, that they may grow worse and worse, till they are ripened for destruction. When Pharaoh hardened his heart God hardened it. When sinners turn their back upon God, desert his service, and so cast a reproach upon it, he does, in a way of righteous judgment, not only withdraw his restraining grace and give them up to their own hearts' lusts, but order them by his providence into such circumstances as occasion their sin and hasten their ruin. There are those to whom Christ himself is *a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence*, 1 Pet. ii. 8. [5.] The righteousness which men relinquish shall never be remembered to their honour or comfort; it will stand them in no stead in this world or the other. Apostates lose all that they have wrought; their services and sufferings are all in vain, and shall never be brought to an account, because not continued in. It is a rule in the law, *Factum non dicitur, quod non perseverat*—We are said to do only that which we do perseveringly, Gal. iii. 3, 4. [6.] If ministers do not give fair warning, as they ought, of the weakness of the best, their aptness to stumble and fall, the particular temptations they are in and the fatal consequences of apostasy, the ruin of those that do apostatize will be laid at their door, and they shall answer for it. Not but that there are those who are warned against it, and yet *turn from their righteousness*; but that case is not put here, as was concerning the wicked man, but, on the contrary, that a *righteous man*, being warned, takes the warning and *does not sin* (v. 21); for, if you *give instruction to a wise man, he will be yet wiser*. We must not only not flatter the wicked, but not flatter even the righteous as if they were perfectly safe any where on this side heaven. [7.] If ministers give warning, and people take it, it is well for both. Nothing is more beautiful than a *wise reprovcr upon an obedient ear*; the one shall live because he is warned and the other has delivered his soul. What can a good minister desire more than to *save himself and those that hear him*? 1 Tim. iv. 16.

22 And the hand of the LORD was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I

will there talk with thee. 23 Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face. 24 Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house. 25 But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them: 26 And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprovcr: for they are a rebellious house. 27 But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbearcth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house.

After all this large and magnificent discovery which God had made of himself to the prophet, and the full instructions he had given him how to deal with those to whom he sent him with an ample commission, we should have expected presently to see him preaching the word of God to a great congregation of Israel; but here we find it quite otherwise. His work here, at first, seems not at all proportionable to the pomp of his call.

I. We have him here retired for further learning. By his unwillingness to go it should seem as if he were not so thoroughly convinced as he might have been of the ability of him that sent him to bear him out; and therefore, to encourage him against the difficulties he foresaw, God will favour him with another vision of his glory, which (if any thing) would put life into him and animate him for his work. In order to this, God calls him out to the plain (v. 22) and there he will have some talk with him. See and admire the condescension of God in conversing thus familiarly with a man, a *son of man*, a poor captive, nay, with a sinful man, who, when God sent him, *went in bitterness of spirit*, and was at this time out of humour with his work. And let us own ourselves for ever indebted to the mediation of Christ for this blessed intercourse and communion between God and man, between heaven and earth. See here the benefit of solitude, and how much it befriends contemplation. It is very comfortable to be alone with God, withdrawn from the world for converse with him, to hear from him, to speak to him; and a good man will say that he is never less alone than when thus



alone. Ezekiel *went forth into the plain* more willingly than he went *among those of the captivity* (v. 15); for those that know what it is to have communion with God cannot but prefer that before any converse with this world, especially such as is commonly met with. He *went out into the plain*, and there he saw the same vision that he had seen *by the river of Chebar*; for God is not tied to places. Note, Those who follow God shall meet with his consolations, wherever they go. God called him out to *talk with him*, but did more than that: he showed him his *glory*, v. 23. We are not now to expect such visions, but we must own that we have a favour done us no way inferior if we so by faith *behold the glory of the Lord* as to be *changed into the same image, by the Spirit of the Lord*; and this honour have all his saints. Praise you the Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18.

II. We have him here restrained from further teaching for the present. When he saw the *glory of the Lord* he *fell on his face*, being struck with an awe of God's majesty and a dread of his displeasure; but the *Spirit entered into him* to raise him up, and then he recovered himself and *got upon his feet* and heard what the Spirit whispered to him, which is very surprising. One would have expected now that God would send him directly to the chief place of concourse, would give him favour in the eyes of his brethren, and make him and his message acceptable to them, that he would have a wider door of opportunity opened to him and that God would give him a door of utterance to open his mouth boldly; but what is here said to him is the reverse of all this.

1. Instead of sending him to a public assembly, he orders him to confine himself to his own lodgings: *Go, shut thyself within thy house*, v. 24. He was not willing to appear in public, and, when he did, the people did not regard him, nor show him the respect he deserved, and as a just rebuke both to him and them, to him for his shyness of them and to them for their coldness towards him, God forbids him to appear in public. Note, Our choice is often made our punishment; and it is a righteous thing with God to remove teachers into corners when they, or their people, or both, grow indifferent to solemn assemblies. Ezekiel must shut up himself, some think, to give a sign of the besieging of Jerusalem, in which the people should be closely shut up as he was in his house, and which he speaks of in the next chapter. He must *shut himself within his house*, that he might receive further discoveries of the mind of God and might abundantly furnish himself with something to say to the people when he went abroad. We find that the *elders of Judah* visited him and *sat before him* sometimes in his house (ch. viii. 1), to be witnesses of

his ecstasies; but it was not till ch. xi. 25 that he *spoke to those of the captivity all the things that the Lord had shown him*. Note, Those that are called to preach must find time to study, and a great deal of time too, must often shut themselves up in their houses, that they may give attendance to reading and meditation, and so their profiting may appear to all.

2. Instead of securing him an interest in the esteem and affections of those to whom he sent him he tells him that *they shall put bands upon him and bind him* (v. 25), either (1.) As a criminal. *They shall bind him* in order to the further punishing of him as a disturber of the peace; though they were themselves sent into bondage in Babylon for persecuting the prophets, yet there they continue to persecute them. Or, rather, (2.) As a distracted man. *They would go about to bind him* as one beside himself; for to that they imputed his violent motions in his raptures. The captains asked Jehu, *Wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?* Festus said to Paul, *Thou art beside thyself*; and so the Jews said of our Lord Jesus, Mark iii. 21. Perhaps this was the reason why he must keep within doors, because otherwise they would bind him, under pretence of his being mad, and therefore he must not *go out among them*. Justly are prophets forbidden to go to those that will abuse them.

3. Instead of opening his lips that his mouth might show forth God's praise, God silenced him, made his *tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth*, so that he was dumb for a considerable time, v. 26. The pious captives in Babylon used this imprecation upon themselves, that, *if they should forget Jerusalem, their tongue might cleave to the roof of their mouth*, Ps. cxxxvii. 6. Ezekiel remembers Jerusalem more than any of them, and yet his *tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth*, and he that can speak best is forbidden to speak at all; and the reason given is because *they are a rebellious house* to whom he is sent, and they are not worthy to have him for a *reprover*. He shall not give them instructions and admonitions, for they are lost and thrown away upon them. He is before commanded to speak boldly to them because *they are most rebellious* (ch. ii. 7); but, since that proves to no purpose, he is now for that reason enjoined silence and shall not speak at all to them. Note, Those whose hearts are hardened against conviction are justly deprived of the means of conviction. Why should not the reprovers be dumb, if, after long trials, it be found that the reprov'd resolve to be deaf? If Ephraim be *joined to idols, let him alone*. *Thou shalt be dumb, and not be a reprover*, implying that unless he were dumb he would be reproving; if he could speak at all, he would witness against the wickedness of the wicked. But when God speaks with him, and designs to speak by him, he *will open his mouth*,

v. 27. Note, Though God's prophets may be silenced awhile, there will come a time when God will give them the opening of the mouth again. And, when God speaks to his ministers, he not only opens their ears to hear what he says, but opens their mouth to return an answer. Moses, who had a veil on his face when he went down to the people, took it off when he went up again to God, Exod. xxxiv. 34.

4. Instead of giving him assurance of success when he should at any time speak to the people, he here leaves the matter very doubtful, and Ezekiel must not perplex and disquiet himself about it, but let it be as it will. *He that hears, let him hear*, and he is welcome to the comfort of it; *let him hear, and his soul shall live*; but *he that forbears, let him forbear* at his peril, and take what comes. *If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*; neither God nor his prophet shall be any losers by it; but the prophet shall be rewarded for his faithfulness in reproving the sinner, and God will have the glory of his justice in condemning him for not taking the reproof.

## CHAP. IV.

Ezekiel was now among the captives in Babylon, but they there had Jerusalem still upon their hearts; the pious captives looked towards it with an eye of faith (as Daniel, ch. vi. 10), the presumptuous ones looked towards it with an eye of pride, and flattered themselves with a conceit that they should shortly return thither again; those that remained corresponded with the captives, and, it is likely, buoyed them up with hopes that all would be well yet, as long as Jerusalem was standing in its strength, and perhaps upbraided those with their folly who had surrendered at first; therefore, to take down this presumption, God gives the prophet, in this chapter, a very clear and affecting foresight of the besieging of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army and the calamities which would attend that siege. Two things are here represented to him in vision:—I. The fortifications that should be raised against the city; this is signified by the prophet's laying siege to the portraiture of Jerusalem (ver. 1—3) and lying first on one side and then on the other side before it, ver. 4—8. II. The famine that should rage within the city; this is signified by his eating very coarse fare, and confining himself to a little of it, so long as this typical representation lasted, ver. 9—17.

**THOU** also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, *even* Jerusalem: 2 And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set *battering*-rams against it round about. 3 Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it *for* a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This *shall* be a sign to the house of Israel. 4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: *according* to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. 5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the num-

ber of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. 7 Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm *shall* be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. 8 And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege.

The prophet is here ordered to represent to himself and others, by signs which would be proper and powerful to strike the fancy and to affect the mind, *the siege of Jerusalem*; and this amounted to a prediction.

I. He was ordered to engrave a draught of Jerusalem upon a tile, v. 1. It was Jerusalem's honour that while she kept her integrity God had *graven her upon the palms of his hands* (Isa. xlix. 16), and the names of the tribes were engraven in precious stones on the breast-plate of the high priest; but, now that *the faithful city has become a harlot*, a worthless brittle tile or brick is thought good enough to *portray it upon*. This the prophet must lay before him, that the eye may affect the heart.

II. He was ordered to build little forts against this portraiture of the city, resembling the batteries raised by the besiegers, v. 2. Between the city that was besieged and himself that was the besieger he was to set up an *iron pan*, as an *iron wall*, v. 3. This represented the inflexible resolution of both sides; the Chaldeans resolved, whatever it cost them, that they would make themselves masters of the city and would never quit it till they had conquered it; on the other side, the Jews resolved never to capitulate, but to hold out to the last extremity.

III. He was ordered to lie upon his side before it, as it were to surround it, representing the Chaldean army lying before it to block it up, to keep the meat from going in and the mouths from going out. He was to lie on his left side 390 days (v. 5), about thirteen months; the siege of Jerusalem is computed to last eighteen months (Jer. lii. 4—6), but if we deduct from that five months' interval, when the besiegers withdrew upon the approach of Pharaoh's army (Jer xxxvii. 5—8), the number of the days of the close siege will be 390. Yet that also had another signification. The 390 days, according to the prophetic dialect, signified 390 years; and, when the prophet lies so



many days on his side, he bears the guilt of that iniquity which *the house of Israel*, the ten tribes, had borne 390 years, reckoning from their first apostasy under Jeroboam to the destruction of Jerusalem, which completed the ruin of those small remains of them that had incorporated with Judah. He is then to lie forty days *upon his right side*, and so long to bear *the iniquity of the house of Judah*, the kingdom of the two tribes, because the measure-filling sins of that people were those which they were guilty of during the last forty years before their captivity, since the thirteenth year of Josiah, when Jeremiah began to prophesy (Jer. i. 1, 2), or, as some reckon it, since the eighteenth, when the book of the law was found and the people renewed their covenant with God. When they persisted in their impieties and idolatries, notwithstanding they had such a prophet and such a prince, and were brought into the bond of such a covenant, what could be expected but ruin without remedy? Judah, that had such helps and advantages for reformation, fills the measure of its iniquity in less time than Israel does. Now we are not to think that the prophet lay constantly night and day upon his side, but every day, for so many days together, at a certain time of the day, when he received visits, and company came in, he was found lying 390 days on his *left side* and *forty days on his right side* before his portraiture of Jerusalem, which all that saw might easily understand to mean the close besieging of that city, and people would be flocking in daily, some for curiosity and some for conscience, at the hour appointed, to see it and to make their different remarks upon it. His being found constantly on the same side, as if *bands were laid upon him* (as indeed they were by the divine command), so that he could not *turn himself from one side to another till he had ended the days of the siege*, did plainly represent the close and constant continuance of the besiegers about the city during that number of days, till they had gained their point.

IV. He was ordered to prosecute the siege with vigour (v. 7): *Thou shalt set thy face towards the siege of Jerusalem*, as wholly intent upon it and resolved to carry it; so the Chaldeans would be, and neither bribed nor forced to withdraw from it. Nebuchadnezzar's indignation at Zedekiah's treachery in breaking his league with him made him very furious in pushing on this siege, that he might chastise the insolence of that faithless prince and people; and his army promised themselves a rich booty of that pompous city; so that both set their faces against it, for they were very resolute. Nor were they less active and industrious, exerting themselves to the utmost in all the operations of the siege, which the prophet was to represent by the *uncovering of his arm*, or, as some read it, the *stretching out of his arm*,

as it were to deal blows about without mercy. When God is about to do some great work he is said to *make bare his arm*, Isa. lii. 10. In short, The Chaldeans will go about their business, and go on in it, as men in earnest, who resolve to go through with it. Now, 1. This is intended to be a *sign to the house of Israel* (v. 3), both to those in Babylon, who were eye-witnesses of what the prophet did, and to those also who remained in their own land, who would hear the report of it. The prophet was *dumb* and *could not speak* (ch. iii. 26); but as his silence had a voice, and upbraided the people with their deafness, so even then God *left not himself without witness*, but ordered him to make signs, as dumb men are accustomed to do, and as Zacharias did when he was dumb, and by them to *make known his mind* (that is, the mind of God) to the people. And thus likewise the people were upbraided with their stupidity and dulness, that they were not capable of being taught as men of sense are, by words, but must be taught as children are, by pictures, or as deaf men are, by signs. Or, perhaps, they are hereby upbraided with their malice against the prophet. Had he spoken in words at length what was signified by these figures, they would have entangled him in his talk, would have indicted him for treasonable expressions, for they knew how to *make a man an offender for a word* (Isa. xxix. 21), to avoid which he is ordered to make use of signs. Or the prophet made use of signs for the same reason that Christ made use of parables, that *hearing they might hear and not understand, and seeing they might see and not perceive*, Matt. xiii. 14, 15. They would not understand what was plain, and therefore shall be taught by that which is difficult; and herein the Lord was righteous. 2. Thus the prophet *prophesies against Jerusalem* (v. 7); and there were those who not only understood it so, but were the more affected with it by its being so represented, for images to the eye commonly make deeper impressions upon the mind than words can, and for this reason sacraments are instituted to represent divine things, that we might see and believe, might see and be affected with those things; and we may expect this benefit by them, and a blessing to go along with them, while (as the prophet here) we make use only of such signs as God himself has expressly appointed, which, we must conclude, are the fittest. Note, The power of imagination, if it be rightly used, and kept under the direction and correction of reason and faith, may be of good use to kindle and excite pious and devout affections, as it was here to Ezekiel and his attendants. "*Methinks I see* so and so, myself dying, time expiring, the world on fire, the dead rising, the great tribunal set, and the like, may have an exceedingly good influence upon us: for fancy is like fire, a good ser-

*vant, but a bad master.* 3. This whole transaction has that in it which the prophet might, with a good colour of reason, have hesitated at and excepted against, and yet, in obedience to God's command, and in execution of his office, he did it according to order. (1.) It seemed childish and ludicrous, and beneath his gravity, and there were those that would ridicule him for it; but he knew the divine appointment put honour enough upon that which otherwise seemed mean to save his reputation in the doing of it. (2.) It was toilsome and tiresome to do as he did; but our ease as well as our credit must be sacrificed to our duty, and we must never call God's service in any instance of it a hard service. (3.) It could not but be very much against the grain with him to appear thus against Jerusalem, the city of God, the holy city, to act as an enemy against a place to which he was so good a friend; but he is a prophet, and must follow his instructions, not his affections, and must plainly preach the ruin of a sinful place, though its welfare is what he passionately desires and earnestly prays for. 4. All this that the prophet sets before the children of his people concerning the destruction of Jerusalem is designed to bring them to repentance, by showing them sin, the provoking cause of this destruction, sin the ruin of that once flourishing city, than which surely nothing could be more effectual to make them hate sin and turn from it; while he thus in lively colours describes the calamity with a great deal of pain and uneasiness to himself, he is *bearing the iniquity of Israel and Judah*. "Look here" (says he) "and see what work sin makes, what an *evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God*; this comes of sin, your sin and the sin of your fathers; let that therefore be the daily matter of your sorrow and shame now in your captivity, that you may make your peace with God and he may return in mercy to you." But observe, It is a day of punishment for a year of sin: *I have appointed thee each day for a year*. The siege is a calamity of 390 days, in which God reckons for the iniquity of 390 years; justly therefore do they acknowledge that God had *punished them less than their iniquity deserved*, Ezra ix. 13. But let impenitent sinners know that, though now God is long-suffering towards them, in the other world there is an everlasting punishment. When God *laid bands* upon the prophet, it was to show them how they were *bound with the cords of their own transgression* (Lam. i. 14), and therefore they were now *holden in the cords of affliction*. But we may well think of the prophet's case with compassion, when God laid upon him the bands of duty, as he does on all his ministers (1 Cor. ix. 16, *Necessity is laid upon me, and woe unto me if I preach not the gospel*); and yet men laid upon him bonds of restraint (ch. iii. 25); but under both it is satisfaction enough that

they are serving the interests of God's kingdom among men.

9 Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, *according* to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. 10 And thy meat which thou shalt eat *shall be* by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time shalt thou eat it. 11 Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time shalt thou drink. 12 And thou shalt eat it *as* barley-cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. 13 And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them. 14 Then said I, Ah Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. 15 Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith. 16 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: 17 That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity.

The best exposition of this part of Ezekiel's prediction of Jerusalem's desolation is Jeremiah's lamentation of it, Lam. iv. 3, 4, &c., and v. 10, where he pathetically describes the terrible famine that was in Jerusalem during the siege and the sad effects of it.

1. The prophet here, to affect the people with the foresight of it, must confine himself for 390 days to coarse fare and short commons, and that ill-dressed, for they should want both food and fuel.

1. His meat, for the quality of it, was to be of the worst bread, made of but little wheat and barley, and the rest of beans, and



lentils, and millet, and fitches, such as we feed horses or fatted hogs with, and this mixed, as mill-corn, or as that in the beggar's bag, that has a dish full of one sort of corn at one house and of another at another house; of such corn as this must the prophet's bread be made while he underwent the fatigue of lying on his side, and needed something better to support him, v. 9. Note, It is our wisdom not to be too fond of dainties and pleasant bread, because we know not what hard meat we may be tied to, nay, and may be glad of, before we die. The meanest sort of food is better than we deserve, and therefore must not be despised nor wasted, nor must those that use it be looked upon with disdain, because we know not what may be our own lot.

2. For the quantity of it, it was to be of the least that a man could be kept alive with, to signify that the besieged should be reduced to short allowance and should hold out till all the bread in the city was spent, Jer. xxxvii. 21. The prophet must eat but twenty *shekels'* weight of bread a day (v. 10), that was about ten ounces; and he must drink but the *sixth part of a hin of water*, that was half a pint, about eight ounces, v. 11. The stint of the Lessian diet is fourteen ounces of meat and sixteen of drink. The prophet in Babylon had bread enough and to spare, and was by the river side, where there was plenty of water; and yet, that he might confirm his own prediction and be a sign to the children of Israel, God obliges him to live thus sparingly, and he submits to it. Note, God's servants must learn to endure hardness, and to deny themselves the use of lawful delights, when they may thereby serve the glory of God, evidence the sincerity of their faith, and express their sympathy with their brethren in affliction. The body must be kept under and brought into subjection. Nature is content with a little, grace with less, but lust with nothing. It is good to stint ourselves of choice, that we may the better bear it if ever we should come to be stinted by necessity. And in times of public distress and calamity it ill becomes us to make much of ourselves, as those that drank wine in bowls and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, Amos vi. 4—6.

3. For the dressing of it, he must bake it with man's dung (v. 12); that must be dried, and serve for fuel to heat his oven with. The thought of it would almost turn one's stomach; yet the coarse bread, thus baked, he must eat as barley-cakes, as freely as if it were the same bread he had been used to. This nauseous piece of cookery he must exercise publicly in their sight, that they might be the more affected with the calamity approaching, which was signified by it, that in the extremity of the famine they should not only have nothing that was dainty, but nothing that was cleanly, about them; they must take up with what they could get. To

the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. This circumstance of the sign, the baking of his bread with man's dung, the prophet with submission humbly desired might be dispensed with (v. 14); it seemed to have in it something of a ceremonial pollution, for there was a law that man's dung should be covered with earth, that God might see no unclean thing in their camp, Deut. xxiii. 13, 14. And must he go and gather a thing so offensive, and use it in the dressing of his meat in the sight of the people? "Ah! Lord God," says he, "behold, my soul has not been polluted, and I am afraid lest by this it be polluted." Note, The pollution of the soul by sin is what good people dread more than any thing; and yet sometimes tender consciences fear it without cause, and perplex themselves with scruples about lawful things, as the prophet here, who had not yet learned that it is not that which goes into the mouth that defiles the man, Matt. xv. 11. But observe he does not plead, "Lord, from my youth I have been brought up delicately and have never been used to any thing but what was clean and nice" (and there were those who were so brought up, who in the siege of Jerusalem did embrace dunghills, Lam. iv. 5), but that he had been brought up conscientiously, and had never eaten any thing that was forbidden by the law, that died of itself or was torn in pieces; and therefore, "Lord, do not put this upon me now." Thus Peter pleaded (Acts x. 14), Lord, I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. Note, It will be comfortable to us, when we are reduced to hardships, if our hearts can witness for us that we have always been careful to abstain from sin, even from little sins, and the appearances of evil. Whatever God commands us, we may be sure, is good; but, if we be put upon any thing that we apprehend to be evil, we should argue against it, from this consideration, that hitherto we have preserved our purity—and shall we lose it now? Now, because Ezekiel with a manifest tenderness of conscience made this scruple, God dispensed with him in this matter. Note, Those who have power in their hands should not be rigorous in pressing their commands upon those that are dissatisfied concerning them, yea, though their dissatisfactions be groundless or arising from education and long usage, but should recede from them rather than grieve or offend the weak, or put a stumbling-block before them, in conformity to the example of God's condescension to Ezekiel, though we are sure his authority is incontestable and all his commands are wise and good. God allowed Ezekiel to use cow's dung instead of man's dung, v. 15. This is a tacit reflection upon man, as intimating that he being polluted with sin his filthiness is more nauseous and odious than that of any other creature. How much more abominable and filthy is man! Job xv. 16.

II. Now this sign is particularly explained here; it signified,

1. That those who remained in Jerusalem should be brought to extreme misery for want of necessary food. All supplies being cut off by the besiegers, the city would soon find the want of the country, for *the king himself is served of the field*; and thus the *staff of bread* would be broken in Jerusalem, v. 16. God would not only take away from the bread its power to nourish, so that *they should eat and not be satisfied* (Lev. xxvi. 26), but would take away the bread itself (Isa. iii. 1), so that what little remained should be *eaten by weight*, so much a day, so much a head, that they might have an equal share and might make it last as long as possible. But to what purpose, when they could not make it last always, and the besieged must be tired out before the besiegers? They should eat and drink *with care*, to make it go as far as might be, and with *astonishment*, when they saw it almost spent and knew not which way to look for a recruit. They should be *astonished one with another*; whereas it is ordinarily some alleviation of a calamity to have others share with us in it (*Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*), and some ease to the spirit to complain of the burden, it should be an aggravation of the misery that it was universal, and their complaining to one another should but make them all the more uneasy and increase the *astonishment*. And the event shall be as bad as their fears; they cannot make it worse than it is, for *they shall consume away for their iniquity*; multitudes of them shall die of famine, a lingering death, worse than that by the sword (Lam. iv. 9); they shall die so as to *feel themselves die*. And it is sin that brings all this misery upon them: *They shall consume away in their iniquity* (so it may be read); they shall continue hardened and impenitent, and shall die in their sins, which is more miserable than to die on a dunghill. Now, (1.) Let us see here what woeful work sin makes with a people, and acknowledge the righteousness of God herein. Time was when *Jerusalem* *was filled with the finest of the wheat* (Ps. cxlvii. 14); but now it would be glad of the coarsest, and cannot have it. *Fulness of bread*, as it was one of Jerusalem's mercies, so it had become one of her sins, Ezek. xvi. 49. The plenty was abused to luxury and excess, which were therefore thus justly punished with famine. It is a righteous thing with God to deprive us of those enjoyments which we have made the food and fuel of our lusts. (2.) Let us see what reason we have to bless God for plenty, not only for the fruits of the earth, but for the freedom of commerce, that the husbandman can have money for his bread and the tradesman bread for his money, that there is abundance not only in the field, but in the market, that those who live in cities and great towns, though they *sow not*, nei-

ther do they *reap*, are yet fed from day to day with food convenient.

2. It signified that those who were carried into captivity should be forced to *eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles* (v. 13), to eat meat made up by Gentile hands otherwise than according to the law of the Jewish church, which they were always taught to call *defiled*, and which they would have as great an aversion to as a man would have to bread prepared with dung, that is (as perhaps it may be understood) kneaded and moulded with dung. Daniel and his fellows confined themselves to *pulse and water*, rather than they would *eat the portion of the king's meat* assigned them, because they apprehended it would defile them, Dan. i. 8. Or they should be forced to eat putrid meat, such as their oppressors would allow them in their slavery, and such as formerly they would have scorned to touch. Because they *served not God* with cheerfulness in the abundance of all things, God will make them serve their enemies in the want of all things.

## CHAP. V.

In this chapter we have a further, and no less terrible, denunciation of the judgments of God, which were coming with all speed and force upon the Jewish nation, which would utterly ruin it; for when God judges he will overcome. This destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is here, I. Represented by a sign, the cutting, and burning, and scattering of hair, ver. 1-4. II. That sign is expounded, and applied to Jerusalem. 1. Sin is charged upon Jerusalem as the cause of this desolation—contempt of God's law (ver. 5-7) and profanation of his sanctuary, ver. 11. 2. Wrath is threatened, great wrath (ver. 8-10), a variety of miseries (ver. 12, 16, 17), such as should be their reproach and ruin, ver. 13-15.

AND thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause *it* to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the *hair*. 2 Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, *and* smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them. 3 Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. 4 Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; *for* thereof shall a fire come forth into all the house of Israel.

We have here the sign by which the utter destruction of Jerusalem is set forth; and here, as before, the prophet is himself the sign, that the people might see how much he affected himself with, and interested himself in, the case of Jerusalem, and how near it lay to his heart, even when he foretold the desolations of it. He was so much concerned about it as to take what was done to it as done to himself, so far was he from desiring the woeful day.



I. He must *shave off the hair of his head and beard* (v. 1), which signified God's utter rejecting and abandoning that people, as a useless worthless generation, such as could well be spared, nay, such as it would be his honour to part with; his judgments, and all the instruments he made use of in cutting them off, were this *sharp knife* and this *razor*, that were proper to be made use of, and would do execution. Jerusalem had been the head, but, having degenerated, had become as the *hair*, which, when it grows thick and long, is but a burden which a man wishes to get clear of, as God of the sinners in Zion. *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*, Isa. i. 24. Ezekiel must not cut off that hair only which was superfluous, but *cut it all off*, denoting the full end that God would make of Jerusalem. The hair that would not be trimmed and kept neat and clean by the admonitions of the prophets must be all shaved off by utter destruction. Those will be ruined that will not be reformed.

II. He must *weigh the hair* and *divide it into three parts*. This intimates the very exact directing of God's judgments according to equity (by him men and their actions are weighed in the unerring balance of truth and righteousness) and the proportion which divine justice observes in punishing some by one judgment and others by another; one way or other, they shall all be met with. Some make the shaving of the hair to denote the loss of their liberty and of their honour: it was looked upon as a mark of ignominy, as in the disgrace Hanun put on David's ambassadors. It denotes also the loss of their joy, for they shaved their heads upon occasion of great mourning; I may add the loss of their Nazariteship, for the shaving of the head was a period to that vow (Num. vi. 18), and Jerusalem was now no longer looked upon as a *holy city*.

III. He must dispose of the hair so that it might all be destroyed or dispersed, v. 2. 1. One *third part must be burnt in the midst of the city*, denoting the multitudes that should perish by famine and pestilence, and perhaps many in the conflagration of the city, *when the days of the siege were fulfilled*. Or the laying of that glorious city in ashes might well be looked upon as a third part of the destruction threatened. 2. Another third part was to be *cut in pieces with a knife*, representing the many who, during the siege, were slain by the sword, in their sallies out upon the besiegers, and especially when the city was taken by storm, the Chaldeans being then most furious and the Jews most feeble. 3. Another third part was to be *scattered in the wind*, denoting the carrying away of some into the land of the conqueror and the flight of others into the neighbouring countries for shelter; so that they were hurried, some one way and some another, like loose hairs in the wind. But, lest they should

think that this dispersion would be their escape, God adds, *I will draw out a sword after them*, so that wherever they go evil shall pursue them. Note, God has variety of judgments wherewith to accomplish the destruction of a sinful people and to make an end when he begins.

IV. He must preserve a small quantity of the third sort that were to be *scattered in the wind*, and *bind them in his skirts*, as one would bind that which he is very mindful and careful of, v. 3. This signified perhaps that little handful of people which were left under the government of Gedaliah, who, it was hoped, would keep possession of the land when the body of the people was carried into captivity. Thus God would have done well for them if they would have done well for themselves. But these few that were reserved must be taken and *cast into the fire*, v. 4. When Gedaliah and his friends were slain the people that put themselves under his protection were scattered, some gone into Egypt, others carried off by the Chaldeans, and in short the land totally cleared of them; then this was fulfilled, for out of those combustions *a fire came forth into all the house of Israel*, who, as fuel upon the fire, kindled and consumed one another. Note, It is ill with a people when those are taken away in wrath that seemed to be marked for monuments of mercy; for then there is no remnant or escaping, none shut up or left.

5 Thus saith the Lord God; This *is* Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries *that are* round about her. 6 And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries *that are* round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them. 7 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye multiplied more than the nations *that are* round about you, *and* have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments, neither have done according to the judgments of the nations *that are* round about you; 8 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, *am* against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations. 9 And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations. 10 Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the

midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds. 11 Wherefore, *as* I live, saith the Lord God; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish *thee*; neither shall mine eye spare, neither will I have any pity. 12 A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee: and a third part shall fall by the sword round about thee; and I will scatter a third part into all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. 13 Thus shall mine anger be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted: and they shall know that I the Lord have spoken *it* in my zeal, when I have accomplished my fury in them. 14 Moreover I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that *are* round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by. 15 So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment unto the nations that *are* round about thee, when I shall execute judgments in thee in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I the Lord have spoken *it*. 16 When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for *their* destruction, *and* which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: 17 So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee. I the Lord have spoken *it*.

We have here the explanation of the foregoing similitude: *This is Jerusalem*. Thus it is usual in scripture language to give the name of the thing signified to the sign; as when Christ said, *This is my body*. The prophet's head, which was to be shaved, signified Jerusalem, which by the judgments of God was now to be stripped of all its ornaments, to be emptied of all its inhabit-

ants, and to be set *naked and bare*, to be *shaved with a razor that is hired*, Isa. vii. 20. The head of one that was a priest, a prophet, a holy person, was fittest to represent Jerusalem the holy city. Now the contents of these verses are much the same with what we have often met with, and still shall, in the writings of the prophets. Here we have,

I. The privileges Jerusalem was honoured with (v. 5): *I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her*, and those famous nations and very considerable. Jerusalem was not situated in a remote obscure corner of the world, far from neighbours, but in the midst of kingdoms that were populous, polite, and civilized, famed for learning, arts, and sciences, and which then made the greatest figure in the world. But there seems to be more in it than this. 1. Jerusalem was dignified and preferred above the neighbouring nations and their cities. It was *set in the midst of them as excelling them all*. *This holy mountain was exalted above all the hills*, Isa. ii. 2. *Why leap you, you high hills? This is the hill which God desires to dwell in*, Ps. lxxviii. 16. Jerusalem was a city upon a hill, conspicuous and illustrious, and which all the neighbouring nations had an eye upon, some for good-will, some for ill-will. 2. Jerusalem was designed to have a good influence upon *the nations and countries round about*, was set in the midst of them as a candle upon a candlestick, to spread the light of divine revelation, which she was blessed with, to all the dark corners of the neighbouring nations, that from them it might diffuse itself further, even to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem was set *in the midst of the nations*, to be as the heart in the body, to invigorate this dead world with a divine life as well as to enlighten this dark world with a divine light, to be an example of every thing that was good. The nations that observed what excellent *statutes and judgments* they had concluded them to be *a wise and understanding people* (Deut. iv. 6), fit to be consulted as an oracle, as they were in Solomon's time, 1 Kings iv. 34. And, had they preserved this reputation and made a right use of it, what a blessing would Jerusalem have been to all the nations about! But, failing to be so, the accomplishment of this intention was reserved for its latter days, *when out of Zion went forth the gospel law and the word of the Lord Jesus from Jerusalem*, and there *repentance and remission* began to be preached, and thence the preachers of them *went forth into all nations*. And, when that was done, Jerusalem was levelled with the ground. Note, When places and persons are made great, it is with design that they may do good and that those about them may be the better for them, that their *light may shine before men*.

II. The provocations Jerusalem was guilty of. A very high charge is here drawn up



against that city, and proved beyond contradiction sufficient to justify God in seizing its privileges and putting it under military execution. 1. She had not walked in God's statutes, nor kept his judgments (v. 7); nay, the inhabitants of Jerusalem had refused his judgments and his statutes (v. 6); they did not do their duty, nay, they would not, they said that they would not. Those statutes and judgments which their neighbours admired they despised, which they should have set before their face they cast behind their back. Note, A contempt of the word and law of God opens a door to all manner of iniquity. God's statutes are the terms on which he deals with men; those that refuse his terms cannot expect his favours. 2. She had changed God's judgments into wickedness (v. 6), a very high expression of profaneness, that the people had not only broken God's laws, but had so perverted and abused them that they had made them the excuse and colour of their wickedness. They introduced the abominable customs and usages of the heathen, instead of God's institutions; this was changing the truth of God into a lie (Rom. i. 25) and the glory of God into shame, Ps. iv. 2. Note, Those that have been well educated, if they live ill, put the highest affront imaginable upon God, as if he were the patron of sin and his judgments were turned into wickedness. 3. She had been worse than the neighbouring nations, to whom she should have set a good example: She has changed my judgments, by idolatries and false worship, more than the nations (v. 6), and she has multiplied (that is, multiplied idols and altars, gods and temples, multiplied those things the unity of which was their praise) more than the nations that were round about. Israel's God is one, and his name one, his altar one; but they, not content with this one God, multiplied their gods to such a degree that according to the number of their cities so were their gods, and their altars were as heaps in the furrows of the field; so that they exceeded all their neighbours in having gods many and lords many. They corrupted revealed religion more than the Gentiles had corrupted natural religion. Note, If those who have made a profession of religion, and have had a pious education, apostatize from it, they are commonly more profane and vicious than those who never made any profession; they have seven other spirits more wicked. 4. She had not done according to the judgments of the nations, v. 7. Israel had not acted towards their God, though he is the only true God, as the nations had acted towards their gods, though they were false gods; they had not been so observant of him nor so constant to him. Has a nation changed its gods, or slighted them, so as they have? Jer. ii. 11. Or it may refer to their morals; instead of reforming their neighbours, they came short of them; and

many who were of the uncircumcision kept the righteousness of the law better than those who were of the circumcision, Rom. ii. 26, 27. Those who had the light of scripture did not according to the judgments of many who had only the light of nature. Note, There are those who are called Christians who will in the great day be condemned by the better tempers and better lives of sober heathens. 5. The particular crime charged upon Jerusalem is profaning the holy things, which she had been both entrusted and honoured with (v. 11): Thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, with thy idols and idolatries. The images of their pretended deities, and the groves erected in honour of them, were brought into the temple; and the ceremonies used by idolaters were brought into the worship of God. Thus every thing that is sacred was polluted. Note, Idols are detestable things any where, but more especially so in the sanctuary.

III. The punishments that Jerusalem should fall under for these provocations: Shall not God visit for these things? No doubt he shall. The matter of the sentence here passed upon Jerusalem is very dreadful, and the manner of expression makes it yet more so; the judgments are various, and the threatenings of them varied, reiterated, inculcated, that one may well say, Who is able to stand in God's sight when once he is angry?

1. God will take this work of punishing Jerusalem into his own hands; and who knows the power of his anger and what a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands? Observe what a strong emphasis is laid upon it (v. 8): I, even I, am against thee. God had been for Jerusalem, to defend and save it; but miserable is its case when he has turned to be its enemy and fights against it. If God be against us, the whole creation is at war with us, and nothing can be for us so as to stand us in any stead: "You think it is only the Chaldean army that is against you, but they are God's hand, or rather the staff in his hand; it is I, even I, that am against thee, not only to speak against thee by prophets, but to act against thee by providence. I will execute judgments in thee (v. 10), in the midst of thee (v. 8), not only in the suburbs, but in the heart of the city, not only in the borders, but in the bowels of the country." Note, Those who will not observe the judgments of God's mouth shall not escape the judgments of his hand; and God's judgments, when they come with commission, will penetrate into the midst of a people, will enter into the soul, into the bowels like water and like oil into the bones. I will execute judgments. Note, God himself undertakes to execute his own judgments, according to the true and full intent of them; whatever are the instruments, he is the principal agent.

2. These punishments shall come from

his displeasure. As to the body of the people, it shall not be a correction in love, but he will *execute judgments in anger, and in fury, and in furious rebukes* (v. 15), strange expressions to come from a God who has said, *Fury is not in me*, and who has declared himself *gracious, and merciful, and slow to anger*. But they are designed to show the malignity of sin, and the offence it gives to the just and holy God. That must needs be a very evil thing which provokes him to such resentments, and against his own people too, that had been so high in his favour, and expressed with so much satisfaction (v. 13): "*My anger, which has long been withheld, shall now be accomplished, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them*; it shall not only light upon them, but lie upon them, and fill them as vessels of wrath fitted by their own wickedness to destruction; and, justice being hereby glorified, *I will be comforted*, I will be entirely satisfied in what I have done." As, when God is dishonoured by the sins of men, he is said to be *grieved* (Ps. xcv. 10), so when he is honoured by their destruction he is said to be *comforted*. The struggle between mercy and judgment is over, and in this case judgment triumphs, triumphs indeed; for mercy that has been so long abused is now silent and gives up the cause, has not a word more to say on the behalf of such an ungrateful incorrigible people: *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have any pity*, v. 11. Divine compassion defers the punishment, or mitigates it, or supports under it, or shortens it; but here is *judgment without mercy*, wrath without any mixture or allay of pity. These expressions are thus sharpened and heightened perhaps with design to look further, to the vengeance of eternal fire, which some of the destructions we read of in the Old Testament were typical of, and particularly that of Jerusalem; for surely it is nowhere on this side hell that this word has its full accomplishment, *My eye shall not spare, but I will cause my fury to rest*. Note, Those who live and die impenitent will perish for ever unpitied; there is a day coming when *the Lord will not spare*.

3. Punishments shall be public and open: *I will execute these judgments in the sight of the nations* (v. 8); the judgments themselves shall be so remarkable that all the nations far and near shall take notice of them; they shall be all the talk of that part of the world, and the more for the conspicuousness of the place and people on which they are inflicted. Note, Public sins, as they call for public reproofs (*those that sin rebuke before all*), so, if those prevail not, they call for public judgments. *He strikes them as wicked men in the open sight of others* (Job xxxiv. 26), that he may maintain and vindicate the honour of his government, for (as Grotius descants upon it here) *why should he suffer it to be said, See what wicked lives those lead*

*who profess to be the worshippers of the only true God!* And, as the publicity of the judgments will redound to the honour of God, so it will serve, (1.) To aggravate the punishment, and to make it lie the more heavily. Jerusalem, being made *waste*, becomes a *reproach among the nations in the sight of all that pass by*, v. 14. The more conspicuous and the more peculiar any have been in the day of their prosperity the greater disgrace attends their fall; and that was Jerusalem's case. The more Jerusalem had been a *praise in the earth* the more it is now a *reproach and a taunt*, v. 15. This she was warned of as much as any thing when her glory commenced (1 Kings ix. 8), and this was lamented as much as any thing when it was laid in the dust, Lam. ii. 15. (2.) To teach the nations to fear before the God of Israel, when they see what a jealous God he is, and how severely he punished sin even in those that are nearest to him. *It shall be an instruction to the nations*, v. 15. Jerusalem should have taught her neighbours the fear of God by her piety and virtue, but, she not doing that, God will teach it to them by her ruin; for they have reason to say, *If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If *judgment begin at the house of God*, where will it end? If those be thus punished who only had some idolaters among them, what will become of us who are all idolaters? Note, The destruction of some is designed for the instruction of others. Malefactors are publicly punished *in terrorem*—that others may take warning.

4. These punishments, in the kind of them, shall be very severe and grievous. (1.) They shall be such as have no precedent or parallel. Their sins being more provoking than those of others, the judgments executed upon them should be uncommon (v. 9): "*I will do in thee that which I have not done in thee before*, though thou hast long since deserved it; nay, that which I have not done in any other city." This punishment of Jerusalem is said to be *greater than that of Sodom* (Lam. iv. 6), which was more grievous than all that went before it; nay, it is such as "*I will not do any more the like*, all the circumstances taken in, to any other city, till the like come to be done again to this city, in its final overthrow by the Romans." This is a rhetorical expression of the most grievous judgments, like that character of Hezekiah, that there was *none like him, before or after him*. (2.) They shall be such as will force them to break the strongest bonds of natural affection to one another, which will be a just punishment of them for their wilfully breaking the bonds of their duty to God (v. 10): *The fathers shall eat the sons, and the sons shall eat the fathers*, through the extremity of the famine, or shall be compelled to do it by their barbarous conquerors (3.) There shall be a compli-



cation of judgments, any one of them terrible enough, and desolating; but what then would they be when they came all together and in perfection? Some shall be taken away by the plague (v. 12); the *pestilence shall pass through thee* (v. 17), sweeping all before it, as the destroying angel; others *shall be consumed with famine*, shall gradually waste away as men in a consumption (v. 12); this is again insisted on (v. 16): *I will send upon them the evil arrows of famine*; hunger shall make them pine, and shall pierce them to the heart, as if arrows, *evil arrows*, poisoned darts, were shot into them. God has many arrows, *evil arrows*, in his quiver; when some are discharged, he has still more in reserve. *I will increase the famine upon you*. A famine in a bereaved country may decrease as fruits spring forth; but a famine in a besieged city will increase of course; yet God speaks of it as his act: "*I will increase it, and will break your staff of bread*, will take away the necessary supports of life, will disappoint you of all that which you depend upon, so that there is no remedy, but you must fall to the ground." Life is frail, is weak, is burdened, so that, if it have not daily bread for its staff to lean upon, it cannot but sink, and is soon gone if that staff be broken. Others *shall fall by the sword round about Jerusalem*, when they sally out upon the besiegers; it is a sword which God will bring, v. 17. The sword of the Lord, that used to be drawn for Jerusalem's defence, is now drawn for its destruction. Others are devoured by *evil beasts*, which will make a prey of those that fly for shelter to the deserts and mountains. They shall meet their ruin where they expected refuge, for there is no escaping the judgments of God, v. 17. And *lastly*, those who escape shall be *scattered into all parts of the world, into all the winds* (so it is expressed, v. 10, 12), intimating that they should not only be dispersed, but hurried, and tossed, and driven to and fro, as *chaff before the wind*. Nay, and Cain's curse (to be fugitives and vagabonds) is not the worst of it neither; their restless life shall be cut off by a bloody death: "*I will draw out a sword after them*, which shall follow them wherever they go. *Evil pursues sinners*; and the curse shall come upon them and overtake them.

5. These punishments will prove their ruin by degrees. They shall be *diminished* (v. 11); their strength and glory shall grow less and less. They shall be *bereaved* (v. 17), emptied of all that which was their joy and confidence. God sends these judgments on purpose to destroy them, v. 16. The arrows are not sent (as those which Jonathan shot) for their direction, but *for their destruction*; for God will *accomplish his fury upon them* (v. 13); the day of God's patience is over, and the ruin is remediless. Though this prophecy was to have its accomplish-

ment now quickly, in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, yet the executioners not being named here, but the criminal only (*this is Jerusalem*), we may well suppose that it looks further, to the final destruction of that great city by the Romans when God made a full end of the Jewish nation, and *caused his fury to rest upon them*.

6. All this is ratified by the divine authority and veracity: *I the Lord have spoken it*, v. 15 and again v. 17. The sentence is passed by him that is Judge of heaven and earth, whose judgment is according to truth, and the judgments of whose hand are according to the judgments of his mouth. He has spoken it who can do it, for with him nothing is impossible. He has spoken it who will do it, for *he is not a man that he should lie*. He has spoken it whom we are bound to hear and heed, whose *ipse dixit*—word commands the most serious attention and submissive assent: *And they shall know that I the Lord have spoken it*, v. 13. There were those who thought it was only the prophet that spoke it in his delirium; but God will make them know, by the accomplishment of it, that he has spoken it in his zeal. Note, Sooner or later, God's word will prove itself.

## CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have, I. A threatening of the destruction of Israel for their idolatry, and the destruction of their idols with them, ver. 1—7. II. A promise of the gracious return of a remnant of them to God, by true repentance and reformation, ver. 8—10. III. Directions given to the prophet and others, the Lord's servants, to lament both the iniquities and the calamities of Israel, ver. 11—14.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, 3 And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, *even I*, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. 4 And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. 5 And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. 6 In all your dwelling-places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. 7 And the slain

shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord.

Here, I. The prophecy is directed to *the mountains of Israel* (v. 1, 2); the prophet must set his face towards them. If he could see so far off as the land of Israel, *the mountains* of that land would be first and furthest seen; towards them therefore he must look, and look boldly and stedfastly, as the judge looks at the prisoner, and directs his speech to him, when he passes sentence upon him. Though *the mountains of Israel* be ever so high and ever so strong, he must set his face against them, as having judgments to denounce that should shake their foundation. *The mountains of Israel* had been *holy mountains*, but now that they had polluted them with their high places God set his face against them and therefore the prophet must. Israel is here put, not, as sometimes, for the ten tribes, but for the whole land. *The mountains* are called upon to hear the word of the Lord, to shame the inhabitants that would not hear. The prophets might as soon gain attention from the mountains as from that rebellious and gainsaying people, to whom they all day long stretched out their hands in vain. Hear, O mountains! the Lord's controversy (Mic. vi. 1, 2), for God's cause will have a hearing, whether we hear it or no. But from the mountains the word of the Lord echoes to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; for to them also the Lord God speaks, intimating that the whole land is concerned in what is now to be delivered and shall be witnesses against this people that they had fair warning given them of the judgments coming, but they would not take it; nay, they contradicted the message and persecuted the messengers, so that God's prophets might more safely and comfortably speak to the hills and mountains than to them.

II. That which is threatened in this prophecy is the utter destruction of the idols and the idolaters, and both by the sword of war. God himself is commander-in-chief of this expedition against *the mountains of Israel*. It is he that says, Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you (v. 3); the sword of the Chaldeans is at God's command, goes where he sends it, comes where he brings it, and lights as he directs it. In the desolations of that war,

1. The idols and all their appurtenances should be destroyed. The *high places*, which were on the tops of mountains (v. 3), shall be levelled and made desolate (v. 6); they shall not be beautified, shall not be frequented as they had been. The *altars*, on which they offered sacrifice and burnt incense to strange gods, shall be broken to pieces and laid waste; the *images* and *idols* shall be defaced, shall be broken and cease, and be cut down, and all the fine costly works about them shall be abolished, v. 4, 6. Observe here, (1.) That war makes woeful de-

solations, which those persons, places, and things that were esteemed most sacred cannot escape; for *the sword devours one as well as another*. (2.) That God sometimes ruins idolatries even by the hands of idolaters, for such the Chaldeans themselves were; but, as if the deity were a local thing, the greatest admirers of the gods of their own country were the greatest despisers of the gods of other countries. (3.) It is just with God to make that a desolation which we make an idol of; for he is a jealous God and will not bear a rival. (4.) If men do not, as they ought, destroy idolatry, God will, first or last, find out a way to do it. When Josiah had destroyed the high places, altars, and images, with the sword of justice, they set them up again; but God will now destroy them with the sword of war, and let us see who dares re-establish them.

2. The worshippers of idols and all their adherents should be destroyed likewise. As all their high places shall be laid waste, so shall all their dwelling-places too, even all their cities, v. 6. Those that profane God's dwelling-place as they had done can expect no other than that he should abandon theirs, ch. v. 11. If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, 1 Cor. iii. 17. It is here threatened that *their slain shall fall in the midst of them* (v. 7); there shall be abundance slain, even in those places which were thought most safe; but it is added as a remarkable circumstance that they shall fall before their idols (v. 4), that their dead carcases should be laid, and their bones scattered, about their altars, v. 5. (1.) Thus their idols should be polluted, and those places profaned by the dead bodies which they had had in veneration. If they will not defile the covering of their graven images, God will, Isa. xxx. 22. The throwing of the carcases among them, as upon the dunghill, intimates that they were but dunghill-deities. (2.) Thus it was intimated that they were but dead things, unfit to be rivals with the living God; for the carcases of dead men, that, like them, have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, were the fittest company for them. (3.) Thus the idols were upbraided with their inability to help their worshippers, and idolaters were upbraided with the folly of trusting in them; for, it should seem, they fell by the sword of the enemy when they were actually before their idols imploring their aid and putting themselves under their protection. Sennacherib was slain by his sons when he was worshipping in the house of his god. (4.) The sin might be read in this circumstance of the punishment; the slain men are cast before the idols, to show that therefore they are slain, because they worshipped those idols; see Jer. viii. 1, 2. Let the survivors observe it, and take warning not to worship images; let them see it, and know that God is the Lord, that the Lord he is God and he alone.



8 Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have *some* that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries. 9 And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations. 10 And they shall know that I *am* the LORD, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them.

Judgment had hitherto triumphed, but in these verses mercy rejoices against judgment. A sad end is made of this provoking people, but not a full end. The ruin seems to be universal, and yet will I leave a remnant, a little remnant, distinguished from the body of the people, a few of many, such as are left when the rest perish; and it is God that leaves them. This intimates that they deserved to be cut off with the rest, and would have been cut off if God had not left them. See Isa. i. 9. And it is God who by his grace works that in them which he has an eye to in sparing them. Now,

I. It is a preserved remnant, saved from the ruin which the body of the nation is involved in (v. 8): *That you may have some who shall escape the sword.* God said (ch. v. 12) that he would draw a sword after those who were scattered, that destruction should pursue them in their dispersions; but here is mercy remembered in the midst of that wrath, and a promise that some of the Jews of the dispersion, as they were afterwards called, should escape the sword. None of those who were to fall by the sword about Jerusalem shall escape; for they trust to Jerusalem's walls for security, and shall be made ashamed of that vain confidence. But some of them shall escape the sword among the nations, where, being deprived of all other stays, they stay themselves upon God only. They are said to have those who shall escape; for they shall be the seed of another generation, out of which Jerusalem shall flourish again.

II. It is a penitent remnant (v. 9): *Those who escape of you shall remember me.* Note, To those whom God designs for life he will give repentance unto life. They are reprieved, and escape the sword, that they may have time to return to God. Note, God's patience both leaves room for repentance and is an encouragement to sinners to repent. Where God designs grace to repent he allows space to repent; yet many who have the space want the grace, many who

escape the sword do not forsake the sin, as it is promised that these shall do. This remnant, here marked for salvation, is a type of the remnant reserved out of the body of mankind to be monuments of mercy, who are made safe in the same way that these were, by being brought to repentance. Now observe here,

1. The occasion of their repentance, and that is a mixture of judgment and mercy—judgment, that they were carried captives, but mercy, that they escaped the sword in the land of their captivity. They were driven out of their own land, but not out of the land of the living, not chased out of the world, as others were and they deserved to be. Note, The consideration of the just rebukes of Providence we are under, and yet of the mercy mixed with them, should engage us to repent, that we may answer God's end in both. And true repentance shall be accepted of God, though we are brought to it by our troubles; nay, sanctified afflictions often prove means of conversion, as to Manasseh.

2. The root and principle of their repentance: *They shall remember me among the nations.* Those who forgot God in the land of their peace and prosperity, who waxed fat and kicked, were brought to remember him in the land of their captivity. The prodigal son never bethought himself of his father's house till he was ready to perish for hunger in the far country. Their remembering God was the first step they took in returning to him. Note, Then there begins to be some hopes of sinners when they begin to think of him whom they have sinned against, and to enquire, *Where is God my Maker?* Sin takes rise in forgetting God, Jer. iii. 21. Repentance takes rise from the remembrance of him and of our obligations to him. God says, *They shall remember me*, that is, "I will give them grace to do so;" for otherwise they would for ever forget him. That grace shall find them out wherever they are, and by bringing God to their mind shall bring them to their right mind. The prodigal, when he remembered his father, remembered how he had sinned against Heaven and before him; so do these penitents. (1.) They remember the base affront they had put upon God by their idolatries, and this is that which an ingenuous repentance fastens upon and most sadly laments. They had departed from God to idols, and given that honour to pretended deities, the creatures of men's fancies and the work of men's hands, which they should have given to the God of Israel. They departed from God, from his word, which they should have made their rule, from his work, which they should have made their business. Their hearts departed from him. The heart, which he requires and insists upon, and without which *bodily exercise profits nothing*, the heart, which should be set upon him, and



carried out towards him, when that *departs from him*, is as the treacherous elopement of a wife from her husband or the rebellious revolt of a subject from his sovereign. *Their eyes also go after their idols*; they doted on them, and had great expectations from them. Their hearts followed their eyes in the choice of their gods (they must have gods that they could see), and then their eyes followed their hearts in the adoration of them. Now the malignity of this sin is that it is spiritual whoredom; it is a *whorish heart that departs from God*; and they are *eyes that go a whoring after their idols*. Note, Idolatry is spiritual whoredom; it is the breach of a marriage-covenant with God; it is the setting of the affections upon that which is a rival with him, and the indulgence of a base lust, which deceives and defiles the soul, and is a great wrong to God in his honour, (2.) They remember what a grief this was to him and how he resented it. They shall remember *that I am broken with their whorish heart and their eyes* that are full of this spiritual adultery, not only angry at it, but grieved, as a husband is at the lewdness of a wife whom he dearly loved, grieved to such a degree that he is broken with it; it breaks his heart to think that he should be so disingenuously dealt with; he is broken as an aged father is with the undutiful behaviour of a rebellious and disobedient son, which sinks his spirits and makes him to stoop. *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*, Ps. xciv. 10. *God's measures were broken* (so some); a stop was put to the current of his favours towards them, and he was even compelled to punish them. This they shall remember in the day of their repentance, and it shall affect and humble them more than any thing, not so much that their peace was broken, and their country broken, as *that God was broken by their sin*. Thus *they shall look on him whom they have pierced and shall mourn*, Zech. xii. 10. Note, Nothing grieves a true penitent so much as to think that his sin has been a grief to God and to the Spirit of his grace.

3. The product and evidence of their repentance: *They shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations*. Thus God will give them grace to qualify them for pardon and deliverance. Though he had been *broken by their whorish heart*, yet he would not quite cast them off. See Isa. lvii. 17, 18; Hos. ii. 13, 14. His goodness takes occasion from their badness to appear the more illustrious. Note, (1.) True penitents see sin to be an abominable thing, that *abominable thing which the Lord hates* and which makes sinners, and even their services, odious to him, Jer. xlv. 4; Isa. i. 11. It defiles the sinner's own conscience, and makes him, unless he be past feeling, an abomination to himself. An idol is particularly called *an abomination*, Isa. xlv. 19. Those gratifica-

tions which the hearts of sinners were set upon as delectable things the hearts of penitents are turned against as detestable things. (2.) There are many *evils committed in these abominations*, many included in them, attendant on them, and flowing from them, many transgressions in one sin, Lev. xvi. 21. In their idolatries they were sometimes guilty of whoredom (as in the worship of Peor), sometimes of murder (as in the worship of Moloch); these were *evils committed in their abominations*. Or it denotes the great malignity there is in sin; it is an abomination that has abundance of evil in it. (3.) Those that truly loathe sin cannot but loathe themselves because of sin; self-loathing is evermore the companion of true repentance. Penitents quarrel with themselves, and can never be reconciled to themselves till they have some ground to hope that God is reconciled to them; nay, then they shall lie down in their shame, when he is pacified towards them, ch. xvi. 63.

4. The glory that will redound to God by their repentance (v. 10): *"They shall know that I am the Lord*; they shall be convinced of it by experience, and shall be ready to own it, *and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them*, finding that what I have said is made good, and made to work for good, and to answer a good intention, and that it was not without just provocation that they were thus threatened and thus punished."

Note, (1.) One way or other God will make sinners to know and own that he is the Lord, either by their repentance or by their ruin. (2.) All true penitents are brought to acknowledge both the equity and the efficacy of the word of God, particularly the threatenings of the word, and to justify God in them and in the accomplishment of them.

11 Thus saith the Lord God; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. 12 He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them. 13 Then shall ye know that I *am the Lord*, when their slain *men* shall be among their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, the place where they did offer sweet savour to all their idols.



14 So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate, yea, more desolate than the wilderness toward Diblath, in all their habitations: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

The same threatenings which we had before in the foregoing chapter, and in the former part of this, are here repeated, with a direction to the prophet to lament them, that those he prophesied to might be the more affected with the foresight of them.

I. He must by his gestures in preaching express the deep sense he had both of the iniquities and of the calamities of the house of Israel (v. 11): *Smite with thy hand and stamp with thy foot*. Thus he must make it to appear that he was in earnest in what he said to them, that he firmly believed it and laid it to heart. Thus he must signify the just displeasure he had conceived at their sins, and the just dread he was under of the judgments coming upon them. Some would reject this use of these gestures, and call them antic and ridiculous; but God bids him use them because they might help to enforce the word upon some and give it the setting on; and those that know the worth of souls will be content to be laughed at by the wits, so they may but edify the weak. Two things the prophet must thus lament:

—1. National sins. *Alas! for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel*. Note, The sins of sinners are the sorrows of God's faithful servants, especially the *evil abominations of the house of Israel*, whose sins are more abominable and have more evil in them than the sins of others. *Alas! What will be in the end hereof?* 2. National judgments. *To punish them for these abominations they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence*. Note, It is our duty to be affected not only with our own sins and sufferings, but with the sins and sufferings of others; and to look with compassion upon the miseries that wicked people bring upon themselves; as Christ beheld Jerusalem and wept over it.

II. He must inculcate what he had said before concerning the destruction that was coming upon them. 1. They shall be run down and ruined by a variety of judgments which shall find them out and follow them wherever they are (v. 12): *He that is far off*, and thinks himself out of danger, because out of the reach of the Chaldeans' arrows, shall find himself not out of the reach of God's arrows, which fly day and night (Ps. xci. 5): *He shall die of the pestilence*. *He that is near* a place of strength, which he hopes will be to him a place of safety, shall fall by the sword, before he can retreat. *He that is so cautious* as not to venture out, but remains in the city, shall there die by the famine, the saddest death of all. *Thus will*

God accomplish his fury, that is, do all that against them which he had purposed to do.

2. They shall read their sin in their punishment; for *their slain men shall be among their idols, round about their altars*, as was threatened before, v. 5—7. There, where they had prostrated themselves in honour of their idols, God will lay them dead, to their own reproach and the reproach of their idols.

They lived among them and shall die among them. They had offered sweet odours to their idols, but there shall their dead carcases send forth an offensive smell, as it were to atone for that misplaced incense.

3. The country shall be all laid waste, as, before, the cities (v. 6): *I will make the land desolate*. That fruitful, pleasant, populous country, that has been as the garden of the Lord, the glory of all lands, shall be desolate, more desolate than the wilderness towards Diblath, v. 14. It is called Diblathaim (Num. xxxiii. 46; Jer. xlviii. 22), that great and terrible wilderness which is described Deut. viii. 15, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions. The land of Canaan is at this day one of the most barren desolate countries in the world. City and country are thus depopulated, *that the altars may be laid waste and made desolate*, v. 6. Rather than their idolatrous altars shall be left standing, both town and country shall be laid in ruins. Sin is a desolating thing; therefore stand in awe and sin not.

#### CHAP. VII.

In this chapter the approaching ruin of the land of Israel is most particularly foretold in affecting expressions often repeated, that it possible they might be awakened by repentance to prevent it. The prophet must tell them, I. That it will be a final ruin, a complete utter destruction, which would make an end of them, a miserable end, ver. 1—6. II. That it is an approaching ruin, just at the door, ver. 7—10. III. That it is an unavoidable ruin, because they had by sin brought it upon themselves, ver. 10—15. IV. That their strength and wealth should be no fence against it, ver. 16—19. V. That the temple, which they trusted in, should itself be ruined, ver. 20—22. VI. That it should be a universal ruin, the sin that brought it having been universal, ver. 23—27.

**M**OREOVER the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. 3 Now is the end come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations. 4 And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity: but I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. 5 Thus saith the Lord God; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. 6 An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is

come. 7 The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble *is* near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. 8 Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. 9 And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations *that are* in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD that smiteth. 10 Behold the day, behold it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. 11 Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them *shall remain*, nor of their multitude, nor of any of their's: neither *shall there be* wailing for them. 12 The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath *is* upon all the multitude thereof. 13 For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision *is* touching the whole multitude thereof, *which* shall not return; neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life. 14 They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath *is* upon all the multitude thereof. 15 The sword *is* without, and the pestilence and the famine within: he that *is* in the field shall die with the sword; and he that *is* in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him.

We have here fair warning given of the destruction of the land of Israel, which was now hastening on apace. God, by the prophet, not only sends notice of it, but will have it inculcated in the same expressions, to show that the thing is certain, that it is near, that the prophet is himself affected with it and desires they should be so too, but finds them deaf, and stupid, and unaffected. When the town is on fire men do not seek for fine words and quaint expressions in which to give an account of it, but cry about the streets, with a loud and lamentable voice, "Fire! fire!" So the prophet here proclaims, *An end! an end! it has come, it has*

*come; behold, it has come. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

I. *An end has come, the end has come* (v. 2), and again (v. 3, 6), *Now has the end come upon thee*—the end which all their wickedness had a tendency to, and which God had often told them it would come to at last, when by his prophets he had asked them, *What will you do in the end hereof?*—the end which all the foregoing judgments had been working towards, as means to bring it about (their ruin shall now be completed)—or *the end*, that is, the period of their state, the final destruction of their nation, as the deluge was *the end of all flesh*, Gen. vi. 13. They had flattered themselves with hopes that they should shortly *see an end* of their troubles. "Yea," says God, "*An end has come*, but a miserable one, not *the expected end*" (which is promised to the pious remnant among them, Jer. xxix. 11); "*it is the end, that end* which you have been so often warned of, *that last end* which Moses wished you to consider (Deut. xxxii. 29), and which, because *Jerusalem remembered not, therefore she came down wonderfully*," Lam. i. 9. This end was long in coming, but *now it has come*. Though the ruin of sinners comes slowly, it comes surely. "*It has come*; it watches for thee, ready to receive thee." This perhaps looks further, to the last destruction of that nation by the Romans, which that by the Chaldeans was an earnest of; and still further to the final destruction of the world of the ungodly. *The end of all things is at hand*; and Jerusalem's last end was a type of *the end of the world*, Matt. xxiv. 3. Oh that we could all see that end of time and days very near, and the end of our own time and days much nearer, that we may secure a happy lot *at the end of the days!* Dan. xii. 13. *This end comes upon the four corners of the land*. The ruin, as it shall be final, so it shall be total; no part of the land shall escape; no, not that which lies most remote. Such will the destruction of the world be; all these things shall be dissolved. Such will the destruction of sinners be; none can avoid it. *Oh that the wickedness of the wicked might come to an end*, before it bring them to an end!

II. *An evil, an only evil, behold, has come*, v. 5. Sin is an evil, an only evil, an evil that has no good in it; it is the worst of evils. But this is spoken of the evil of trouble; it is an evil, one evil, and that one shall suffice to affect and complete the ruin of the nation; there needs no more to do its business; this one shall *make an utter end*, affliction needs not *rise up a second time*, Nah. i. 9. It is an evil without precedent or parallel, an evil that stands alone; you cannot produce such another instance. It is to the impenitent an evil, an only evil; it hardens their hearts and irritates their corruptions, whereas there were those to whom it was sanctified by the grace of God and made a means of much



good; they were sent into Babylon for their good, Jer. xxiv. 5. The wicked have the dregs of that cup to drink which to the righteous is full of mixtures of mercy, Ps. lxxv. 8. The same affliction is to us either a half evil or an only evil according as we conduct ourselves under it and make use of it. But when an end, the end, has come upon the wicked world, then an evil, an only evil, comes upon it, and not till then. The sorest of temporal judgments have their allays, but the torments of the damned are an evil, an only evil.

III. *The time has come*, the set time, for the inflicting of this only evil and the making of this full end; for to all God's purposes there is a time, a proper time, and that prefixed, in which the purpose shall have its accomplishment; particularly the time of reckoning with wicked people, and rendering to them according to their deserts, is fixed, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*; and he sees, whether we see it or no, that *this day is coming*. This they are here told of again and again (v. 10): *Behold, the day that has lingered so long has come at last, behold, it has come. The time has come, the day draws near, the day of trouble is near*, v. 7, 12. Though threatened judgments may be long deferred, yet they shall not be dropped; the time for executing them will come. Though God's patience may put them off, nothing but man's sincere repentance and reformation will put them by. *The morning has come unto thee* (v. 7), and again (v. 10), *The morning has gone forth*; the day of trouble dawns, the day of destruction is already begun. *The morning* discovers that which was hidden; they thought their secret sins would never come to light, but now they will be brought to light. They used to try and execute malefactors in the morning, and such a morning of judgment and execution is now coming upon them, *a day of trouble to sinners, the year of their visitation*. See how stupid these people were, that, though the day of their destruction was already begun, yet they were not aware of it, but must be thus told of it again and again. *The day of trouble*, real trouble, *is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains*, that is, not a mere echo or report of troubles, as they were willing to think it was, nothing but a groundless surmise; as if the men that came against them were but the shadow of the mountains (as Zebul suggested to Gaal, Judg. ix. 36) and the intelligence they received were but an empty sound, reverberated from the mountains. No; the trouble is not a fancy, and so you will soon find.

IV. All this comes from God's wrath, not allayed, as sometimes it has been, with mixtures of mercy. This is the fountain from which all these calamities flow; and this is the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery, which make it bitter indeed (v. 3): *I will send my anger upon thee*. Observe,

God is Lord of his anger; it does not break out but when he pleases, nor fasten upon any but as he directs it and gives it commission. The expression rises higher (v. 8): *Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee* in full vials, and accomplish my anger, all the purposes and all the products of it, upon thee. This wrath does not single out here and there one to be made examples, but it is upon all the multitude thereof (v. 12, 14); the whole body of the nation has become a vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction. God does sometimes in wrath remember mercy, but now he says, *My eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity*, v. 4 and again v. 9. Those shall have judgment without mercy who made light of mercy when it was offered them.

V. All this is the just punishment of their sins, and it is what they have by their own folly brought upon themselves. This is much insisted on here, that they might be brought to justify God in all he had brought upon them. God never sends his anger but in wisdom and justice; and therefore it follows, *"I will judge thee according to thy ways"*, v. 3. I will examine what thy ways have been, compare them with the law, and then deal with thee according to the merit of them, and recompense them to thee," v. 4. Note, In the heaviest judgments God inflicts upon sinners he does but recompense their own ways upon them; they are beaten with their own rod. And, when God comes to reckon with a sinful people, he will bring every provocation to account: *"I will recompense upon thee all thy abominations"* (v. 3); and now *thy iniquity shall be found to be hateful* (Ps. xxxvi. 2) and *thy abominations shall be in the midst of thee* (v. 4); that is, the secret wickedness shall now be brought to light, and that shall appear to have been in the midst of thee which before was not suspected; and thy sin shall now become an abomination to thyself. So the abomination of iniquity will be when it comes to be an abomination of desolation, Matt. xxiv. 15. Or, *Thy abominations* (that is, the punishments of them) *shall be in the midst of thee*; they shall reach to thy heart. See Jer. iv. 18. Or therefore God will not spare, nor have pity, because, even when he is recompensing their ways upon them, yet in their distress they trespass yet more; their abominations are still in the midst of them, indulged and harboured in their hearts. It is repeated again (v. 8, 9), *I will judge thee, I will recompense thee*. Two sins are particularly specified as provoking God to bring these judgments upon them—pride and oppression. 1. God will humble them by his judgments, for they have magnified themselves. *The rod of affliction has blossomed*, but it was pride that budded, v. 10. What buds in sin will blossom in some judgment or other. The pride of Judah and Jerusalem appeared among all orders and degrees of men, as buds upon the tree in spring. 2. Their enemies shall deal



hardly with them, for they have dealt hardly with one another (v. 11): *Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness*; that is, their injuriousness to one another is protected and patronised by the power of the magistrate. The rod of government had become a *rod of wickedness*, to such a degree of impudence was *violence risen up*. I saw the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, Eccl. iii. 16; Isa. v. 7. Whatever are the fruits of God's judgments, it is certain that our sin is the root of them.

VI. There is no escape from these judgments nor fence against them, for they shall be universal and shall bear down all before them, without remedy. 1. Death in its various shapes shall ride triumphantly, both in town and in country, both within the city and without it, v. 15. Men shall be safe nowhere; for *he that is in the field shall die by the sword* (every field shall be to them a field of battle) and *he that is in the city*, though it be a holy city, yet it shall not be his protection, but *famine and pestilence shall devour him*. Sin had abounded both in city and country, *Iliacos intra muros peccator et extra—Trojans and Greeks offend alike*; and therefore among both desolations are made. 2. None of those that are marked for death shall escape: *There shall none of them remain*. None of those proud oppressors that did violence to their poor neighbours with *the rod of wickedness*, none of them shall be left, but they shall be all swept away by the desolation that is coming (v. 11): *None of their multitude*, that is, of the rabble, whom they set on to do mischief, and to countenance them in doing it, to cry, "Crucify, crucify," when they were resolved on the destruction of any, *none of them shall remain, nor any of theirs*; their families shall all be destroyed, and neither root nor branch left them. This multitude, this mob, divine vengeance will in a particular manner fasten upon; for *wrath is upon all the multitude thereof* (v. 12, 14) and *the vision was touching the whole multitude thereof* (v. 13), the bulk of the common people. The judgments coming shall carry them away by wholesale, and they shall neither secure themselves nor their masters whose creatures and tools they were. God's judgments, when they come with commission, cannot be overpowered by multitudes. *Though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished*. 3. Those that fall shall not be lamented (v. 11): *There shall be no weeping for them*, for there shall be none left to bewail them, but such as are hastening apace after them. And the times shall be so bad that men shall rather congratulate than lament the death of their friends, as reckoning those happy that are taken away from seeing these desolations and sharing in them, Jer. xvi. 4, 5. 4. They shall not be able to make any resistance. The decree has gone forth, and *the vision concerning them shall not return*, v. 13. God will not

recall it, and they cannot defeat it; and therefore *it shall not return re infecta—without having accomplished any thing*, but shall accomplish that for which he sends it. God's word will take place, and then, (1.) Particular persons cannot make their part good against God: *No man shall strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life*; it will be to no purpose for sinners to set God and his judgments at defiance as they used to do. *None ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*. Those that strengthen themselves in their wickedness will be found not only to weaken, but to ruin, themselves, Ps. lii. 7. (2.) *The multitude* cannot resist the torrent of these judgments, nor make head against them (v. 14): *They have blown the trumpet*, to call their soldiers together, and to animate and encourage those whom they have got together, and thus they think to *make all ready*; but all in vain; none enlist themselves, or those that do have not courage to face the enemy. Note, If God be against us, none can be for us to do us any service. 5. They shall have no hope of the return of their prosperity, with which to support themselves in their adversity; they shall have given up all for gone; and therefore, *"Let not the buyer rejoice that he is increasing his estate and has become a purchaser; nor let the seller mourn that he is lessening his estate and has become a bankrupt,"* v. 12. See the vanity of the things of this world, and how worthless they are—that in a time of trouble, when we have most need of them, we may perhaps make least account of them. Those that have sold are the more easy, having the less to lose, and those that have bought have but increased their own cares and fears. *Because the fashion of this world passes away*, let those that buy be as though they possessed not, because they know not how soon they may be dispossessed, 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. It is added (v. 13), *"The seller shall not return, at the year of jubilee, to that which is sold*, according to the law, though he should escape the sword and pestilence, and live till that year comes; for no inheritances shall be enjoyed here till the seventy years be accomplished, and then men shall return to their possessions, shall claim and have their own again." In the belief of this, Jeremiah, about this time, *bought his uncle's field*, yet, according to the charge, the buyer did not rejoice, but complain, Jer. xxxii. 25. 6. God will be glorified in all: *"You shall know that I am the Lord* (v. 4), *that I am the Lord that smiteth*, v. 9. You look at second causes, and think it is Nebuchadnezzar that smites you, but you shall be made to know he is but the staff: it is the hand of the Lord that smiteth you, and who knows the weight of his hand?" Those who would not know it was the *Lord that did them good* shall be made to know it is *the Lord that smiteth* them; for, one way or other, he will be owned.



16 But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. 17 All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak *as water*. 18 They shall also gird *themselves* with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame *shall be* upon all faces, and baldness upon all their heads. 19 They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumbling-block of their iniquity. 20 As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty: but they made the images of their abominations *and* of their detestable things therein: therefore have I set it far from them. 21 And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it. 22 My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret *place*: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it.

We have attended the fate of those that are cut off, and are now to attend the flight of those that have an opportunity of escaping the danger; some of them *shall escape* (v. 16), but what the better? As good die once as, in a miserable life, die a thousand deaths, and escape only like Cain to be *fugitives and vagabonds*, and afraid of being slain by every one they meet; so shall these be.

I. They shall have no comfort or satisfaction in their own minds, but be in continual anguish and terror; for, wherever they go, they carry about with them guilty consciences, which make them a burden to themselves. 1. They shall be always solitary and under prevailing melancholy; they shall not be in the cities, or places of concourse, but all alone *upon the mountains*, not caring for society, but shy of it, as being ashamed of the low circumstances to which they are reduced. 2. They shall be always sorrowful. Those have reason to be so that are under the tokens of God's displeasure; and God can make those so that have been most jovial and have set sorrow at defiance. Those that once thought themselves as the lions of the mountains, so daring were they, now become as the *doves of the valleys*, so timid are they, and so dispirited, ready to

*flee when none pursues* and to tremble at the shaking of a leaf. They are all of them mourning (not with a *godly sorrow*, but with the *sorrow of the world*, which *works death*), *every one for his iniquity*, that is, for those calamities which they now see their iniquity has brought upon them, not only the iniquity of the land, but their own: they shall then be brought to acknowledge what they have each of them contributed to the national guilt. Note, Sooner or later sin will have sorrow of one kind or other; and those that will not repent of their iniquity may justly be left to pine away in it; those that will not mourn for it as it is an offence to God shall be made to mourn for it as it is a shame and ruin to themselves, to *mourn at the last, when the flesh and the body are consumed, and to say, How have I hated instruction!* Prov. v. 11, 12. 3. They shall be deprived of all their strength of body and mind (v. 17): *All hands shall be feeble*, so that they shall not be able to fight, or defend themselves, and *all knees shall be weak as water*, so that they shall neither be able to flee nor to stand their ground; they shall feel a universal colliquation: their knees *shall flow as water*, so that they must fall of course. Note, It is folly for the *strong man to glory in his strength*, for God can soon weaken it. 4. They shall be deprived of all their hopes and shall abandon themselves to despair (v. 18); they shall have nothing to hold up their spirits with; their aspects shall show what are their prospects, all dreadful, for they shall *gird themselves with sackcloth*, as having no expectation ever to wear better clothing. *Horror shall cover them, and shame, and baldness*, all the expressions of a desperate sorrow, Isa. xvii. 11. Note, Those that will not be kept from sin by fear and shame shall by fear and shame be punished for it; such is the confusion that sin will end in.

II. They shall have no benefit from their wealth and riches, but shall be perfectly sick of them, v. 19. Those that were reduced to this distress were such as had had abundance of *silver and gold*, money, and plate, and jewels, and other valuable goods, from which they promised themselves a great deal of advantage in times of public trouble. They thought their wealth would be *their strong city*, that with it they could bribe enemies and buy friends, that it would be the ransom of their lives, that they could never want bread as long as they had money, and that *money would answer all things*; but see how it proved. 1. Their wealth had been a great temptation to them in the *day of their prosperity*; they set their affections upon it, and put their confidence in it. By their eager pursuit of it they were drawn into sin, and by their plentiful enjoyment of it they were hardened in sin; and thus it was the stumbling-block of their iniquity; it occasioned their falling into sin and obstructed their return to God. Note, There are many

whose wealth is their snare and ruin. The gaining of the world is the losing of their souls; it makes them proud, secure, covetous, oppressive, voluptuous; and that which, if well used, might have been the servant of their piety, being abused, becomes *the stumbling-block of their iniquity*. 2. It was no relief to them now in the day of their adversity; for, (1.) Their *gold and silver* could not protect them from the judgments of God. *They shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord*; they shall not serve to atone his justice, or turn away his wrath, nor to screen them from the judgments he is bringing upon them. Note, *Riches profit not in the day of wrath*, Prov. xi. 4. They neither set them so high that God's judgments cannot reach them nor make them so strong that they cannot conquer them. There is a day of wrath coming, when it will appear that men's wealth is utterly unable to deliver them or do them any service. What the better was the rich man for his full barns when his soul was required of him, or that other rich man for his *purple, and scarlet, and sumptuous fare*, when in hell he could not procure a drop of water to *cool his tongue*? Money is no defence against the arrests of death, nor any alleviation to the miseries of the damned. (2.) Their *gold and silver* could not give them any content under their calamities. [1.] They could not fill their bowels; when there was no bread left in the city, none to be had for love or money, their silver and gold could not satisfy their hunger, nor serve to make one meal's meat for them. Note, We could better be without mines of gold than fields of corn; the products of the earth, which may easily be gathered from the surface of it, are much greater blessings to mankind than its treasures, which are with so much difficulty and hazard dug out of its bowels. If God give us daily bread, we have reason to be thankful, and no reason to complain, though silver and gold we have none. [2.] Much less could they satisfy their souls, or yield them any inward comfort. Note, The wealth of this world has not that in it which will answer the desires of the soul, or be any satisfaction to it in a day of distress. *He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver*, much less he that loses it. (3.) Their *gold and silver shall be thrown into the streets*, either by the hands of the enemy, who shall have more spoil than they care for or can carry away (silver shall be nothing accounted of; they shall cast that in the streets; but the *gold*, which is more valuable, shall be removed and brought to Babylon); or they themselves shall *throw away their silver and gold*, because it would be an incumbrance to them and retard their flight, or because it would expose them and be a temptation to the enemy to cut their throats for their money, or in indignation at it, because, after all the care and pains they had taken

to scrape it together and hoard it up, they found that it would stand them in no stead, but do them a mischief rather. Note, *The world passes away, and the lusts thereof*. 1 John ii. 17. The time may come when worldly men will be as weary of their wealth as now they are wedded to it, when those will fare best that have least.

III. God's temple shall stand them in no stead, v. 20—22. This they had prided themselves in, and promised themselves security from (Jer. vii. 4; Mic. iii. 11); but this confidence of theirs shall fail them. Observe, 1. The great honour God had done to that people in setting up his sanctuary among them (v. 20): *As for the beauty of his ornament, that holy and beautiful house, where they and their fathers praised God* (Isa. lxiv. 11), which was therefore beautiful because holy (it was called the *beauty of holiness*, and holiness is the beauty of its ornament; it was also adorned with gold and gifts)—as for this, *he set it in majesty*; every thing was contrived to make it magnificent, that it might help to make the people of Israel the more illustrious among their neighbours. *He built his sanctuary like high palaces*, Ps. lxxviii. 69. It was a *glorious high throne from the beginning*, Jer. xvii. 12. But, 2. Here is the great dishonour they had done to God in profaning his sanctuary; they *made the images of their counterfeit deities*, which they set up in rivalry with God, and which are here called *their abominations* and *their detestable things* (for so they were to God, and so they should have been to them), and these they set up in God's temple, than which a greater affront could not be put upon him. And therefore, 3. It is here threatened that they shall be deprived of the temple, and it shall be no succour to them: *Therefore have I set it far from them*, that is, sent them far from it, so that it is out of the reach of their services and they are out of the reach of its influences. Note, God's ordinances, and the privileges of a profession of religion, will justly be taken away from those that despise and profane them. Nay, they shall not only be kept at a distance from the temple, but the temple itself shall be involved in the common desolation (v. 21); the Chaldeans, who are *strangers*, and therefore have no veneration for it, who are the *wicked of the earth*, and therefore have an antipathy to it, shall *have it for a prey and for a spoil*; all the ornaments and treasures of it shall fall into their hands, who will make no difference between that and other plunder. This was a grief to the saints in Zion, who complained of nothing so much as of that which *the enemy did wickedly in the sanctuary* (Ps. lxxiv. 3); but it was the punishment of the sinners in Zion, who, by profaning the temple with *strange gods*, provoked God to suffer it to be profaned by *strange nations*, and to *turn his face from those that*



*did it* as if he had not seen them and their crimes and from those that deprecated it as not regarding them and their prayers. Let the soldiers do as they will; let them *enter into the secret place*, into the holy of holies, as robbers; let them strip it, let them pollute it; its defence has departed, and then farewell all its glory. Note, Those are unworthy to be honoured with the form of godliness who will not be governed by the power of godliness.

23 Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence. 24 Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. 25 Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and *there shall be none*. 26 Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. 27 The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Here is, I. The prisoner arraigned: *Make a chain*, in which to drag the criminal to the bar, and set him before the tribunal of divine justice; let him stand in fetters (as a notorious malefactor), stand pinioned to receive his doom. Note, Those that break the bands of God's law *asunder*, and *cast away those cords from them*, will find themselves bound and held by the chains of his judgments, which they cannot break nor cast from them. The chain signified the siege of Jerusalem, or the slavery of those that were carried into captivity, or that they were all bound over to the righteous judgment of God, *reserved in chains*.

II. The indictment drawn up against the prisoner: *The land is full of bloody crimes, full of the judgments of blood* (so the word is), that is, of the guilt of blood which they had shed under colour of justice and by forms of law, with the solemnity of a judgment. The innocent blood which Manasseh shed, probably thus shed, by the *judgment of the blood*, was the measure-filling sin of Jerusalem, 2 Kings xxiv. 4. Or, It is full of such crimes as by the law were to be punished with death, *the judgment of blood*. Idolatry, blasphemy, witchcraft, Sodomy,

and the like, were *bloody crimes*, for which particular sinners were to die; and therefore, when they had become national, there was no remedy but the nation must be cut off. Note, Bloody crimes will be punished with bloody judgments. *The city*, the city of David, the holy city, that should have been the pattern of righteousness, the protector of it, and the punisher of wrong, *is now full of violence*; the rulers of that city, having greater power and reputation, are greater oppressors than any others. This was sadly to be lamented. *How has the faithful city become a harlot!*

III. Judgment given upon this indictment. God will reckon with them not only for the profaning of his sanctuary, but for the perverting of justice between man and man; for, as *holiness becomes his house*, so the *righteous Lord loves righteousness* and is the avenger of unrighteousness. Now the judgment given is, 1. That since they had walked in the way of the heathen, and done worse than they, God would *bring the worst of the heathen upon them* to destroy them and lay them waste, the most barbarous and outrageous, that have the least compassion to mankind and the greatest antipathy to the Jews. Note, Of the heathen some are worse than others, and God sometimes picks out the worst to be a scourge to his own people, because he intends them for the fire when the work is done. 2. That since they had filled their houses with goods unjustly gotten, and used their pomp and power for the crushing and oppressing of the weak, God would give their houses to be possessed and all the furniture of them to be enjoyed by strangers, and *make the pomp of the strong to cease*, so that their great men should not dazzle the eyes of the weak-sighted with their pomp, nor with their might at any time prevail against right, as they had done. 3. That, since they had *defiled the holy places* with their idolatries, God would defile them with his judgments, since they had set up the images of other gods in the temple, God would remove thence the tokens of the presence of their own God. When the holy places are deserted by their God they will soon be defiled by their enemies. 4. Since they had followed one sin with another, God would pursue them with one judgment upon another: "*Destruction comes, utter destruction* (v. 25); for there shall come *mischief upon mischief* to ruin you, and *rumour upon rumour* to frighten you, like the waves in a storm, one upon the neck of another." Note, Sinners that are marked for ruin shall be prosecuted to it; for God will overcome when he judges. 5. Since they had disappointed God's expectations from them, he would disappoint their expectations from him; for, (1.) They shall not have the *deliverance out of their troubles* that they expect. They shall *seek peace*; they shall desire it and pray for it; they shall aim at

and expect it: but *there shall be none*; their attempts both to court their enemies and to conquer them shall be in vain, and their troubles shall grow worse and worse. (2.) They shall not have the direction in the trouble that they expect (v. 26): *They shall seek a vision of the prophet*, shall desire, for their support under their troubles, to be assured of a happy issue out of them. They did not desire a vision to reprove them for sin, nor to warn them of danger, but to promise them deliverance. Such messages they longed to hear. But *the law shall perish from the priest*; he shall have no words either of counsel or comfort to say to them. They would not hear what God had to say to them by way of conviction, and therefore he has nothing to say to them by way of encouragement. *Counsel shall perish from the ancients*; the elders of the people, that should advise them what to do in this difficult juncture, shall be infatuated and at their wits' end. It is bad with a people when those that should be their counsellors know not how to consider within themselves, consult with one another, or counsel them. 6. Since they had animated and encouraged one another to sin, God would dispirit and dishearten them all, so that they should not be able to make head against the judgments of God that were breaking in upon them. All orders and degrees of men shall lie down by consent under the load (v. 27): *The king*, that should inspire life into them, and *the prince*, that should lead them on to attack the enemy, *shall mourn* and be *clothed with desolation*; their heads and hearts shall fail, their politics and their courage; and then no wonder if *the hands of the people of the land*, that should fight for them, be *troubled*. None of the men of might shall *find their hands*. What can men contrive or do for themselves when God has departed from them and appears against them? All must needs be in *tears*, all in *trouble*, when God comes to *judge them according to their deserts*, and so make them know, to their cost, that he is the Lord, the God to whom *vengeance belongs*.

## CHAP. VIII.

God, having given the prophet a clear foresight of the people's miseries that were hastening on, here gives him a clear insight into the people's wickedness, by which God was provoked to bring these miseries upon them, that he might justify God in all his judgments, might the more particularly reprove the sins of the people, and with the more satisfaction forget their ruin. Here God, in vision, brings him to Jerusalem, to show him the sins that were committed there, though God had begun to contend with them (ver. 1-4), and there he sees, I. The image of jealousy set up at the gate of the altar, ver. 5, 6. II. The elders of Israel worshipping all manner of images in a secret chamber, ver. 7-12. III. The women weeping for Tammuz, ver. 13, 14. IV. The men worshipping the sun, ver. 15, 16. And then appeals to him whether such a provoking people should have any pity shown them, ver. 17, 18.

AND it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the

Lord God fell there upon me. 2 Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. 3 And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. 4 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. 5 Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. 6 He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.

Ezekiel was now in Babylon; but the messages of wrath he had delivered in the foregoing chapters related to Jerusalem, for in the peace or trouble thereof the captives looked upon themselves to have peace or trouble, and therefore here he has a vision of what was done at Jerusalem, and this vision is continued to the close of the 11th chapter.

I. Here is the date of this vision. The first vision he had was in the *fifth year of the captivity, in the fourth month and the fifth day of the month, ch. i. 1, 2*. This was just fourteen months after. Perhaps it was after he had lain 390 days on his left side, to bear the iniquity of Israel, and before he began the forty days on his right side, to bear the iniquity of Judah; for now he was sitting in the house, not lying. Note, God keeps a particular account of the messages he sends to us, because he will shortly call us to account about them.

II. The opportunity is taken notice of, as well as the time. 1. The prophet was himself *sitting in his house*, in a sedate composed frame, deep perhaps in contemplation. Note, The more we retreat from the world, and retire into our own hearts, the better frame



we are in for communion with God: those that sit down to consider what they have learned shall be taught more. Or, *He sat in his house*, ready to preach to the company that resorted to him, but waiting for instructions what to say. God will communicate more knowledge to those who are communicative of what they do know. 2. *The elders of Judah*, that were now in captivity with him, *sat before him*. It is probable that it was on the sabbath day, and that it was usual for them to attend on the prophet every sabbath day, both to hear the word from him and to join with him in prayer and praise: and how could they spend the sabbath better, now that they had neither temple nor synagogue, neither priest nor altar? It was a great mercy that they had opportunity to spend it so well, as the good people in Elisha's time, 2 Kings iv. 23. But some think it was on some extraordinary occasion that they attended him, to enquire of the Lord, and *sat down* at his feet to *hear his word*. Observe here, (1.) When the law had perished from the priests at Jerusalem, whose lips should keep knowledge (ch. vii. 26), those in Babylon had a prophet to consult. God is not tied to places or persons. (2.) Now that the elders of Judah were in captivity they paid more respect to God's prophets, and his word in their mouth, than they did when they lived in peace in their own land. When God brings men into the cords of affliction, then he opens their ears to discipline, Job xxxvi. 8, 10; Ps. cxli. 6. Those that despised vision in the valley of vision prized it now that the word of the Lord was precious and there was no open vision. (3.) When our teachers are driven into corners, and are forced to preach in private houses, we must diligently attend them there. A minister's house should be a church for all his neighbours. Paul preached in his own hired house at Rome, and God owned him there, and no man forbade him.

III. The divine influence and impression that the prophet was now under: *The hand of the Lord fell there upon me*. God's hand took hold of him, and arrested him, as it were, to employ him in this vision, but at the same time supported him to bear it.

IV. The vision that the prophet saw, v. 2. He beheld a likeness, of a man we may suppose, for that was the likeness he saw before, but it was all brightness above the girdle and all fire below, fire and flame. This agrees with the description we had before of the apparition he saw, ch. i. 27. It is probable that it was the same person, the man Christ Jesus. It is probable that the elders that sat with him (as the men that journeyed with Paul) saw a light and were afraid, and this happy sight they gained by attending the prophet in a private meeting, but they had no distinct view of him that spoke to him, Acts xxii. 9.

V. The prophet's remove, in vision, to Jerusalem. The apparition he saw put forth the form of a hand, which took him by a lock of his head, and the Spirit was that hand which was put forth, for the Spirit of God is called the finger of God. Or, The spirit within him lifted him up, so that he was borne up and carried on by an internal principle, not an external violence. A faithful ready servant of God will be drawn by a hair, by the least intimation of the divine will, to his duty; for he has that within him which inclines him to a compliance with it, Ps. xxvii. 8. He was miraculously lifted up between heaven and earth, as if he were to fly away upon eagles' wings. This, it is probable (so Grotius thinks), the elders that sat with him saw; they were witnesses of the hand taking him by the lock of hair, and lifting him up, and then perhaps laying him down again in a trance or ecstasy, while he had the following visions, whether in the body or out of the body, we may suppose, he could not tell, any more than Paul in a like case, much less can we. Note, Those are best prepared for communion with God and the communications of divine light that by divine grace are raised up above the earth and the things of it, to be out of their attractive force. But, being lifted up towards heaven, he was carried in vision to Jerusalem, and to God's sanctuary there; for those that would go to heaven must take that in their way. The Spirit represented to his mind the city and temple as plainly as if he had been there in person. O that by faith we could thus enter into the Jerusalem, the holy city, above, and see the things that are invisible!

VI. The discoveries that were made to him there.

1. There he saw the glory of God (v. 4): Behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, the same appearance of the living creatures, and the wheels, and the throne, that he had seen, ch. i. Note, God's servants, wherever they are and whithersoever they go, ought to carry about with them a believing regard to the glory of God and to set that always before them; and those that have seen God's power and glory in the sanctuary should desire to see them again, so as they have seen them, Ps. lxxiii. 2. Ezekiel has this repeated vision of the glory of God both to give credit to and to put honour upon the following discoveries. But it seems to have a further intention here; it was to aggravate this sin of Israel, in changing their own God, the God of Israel (who is a God of so much glory as here he appears to be), for dunghill gods, scandalous gods, false gods, and indeed no gods. Note, The more glorious we see God to be the more odious we shall see sin to be, especially idolatry, which turns his truth into a lie, his glory into shame. It was also to aggravate their approaching misery, when this

glory of the Lord should remove from them (*ch. xi. 23*) and leave the house and city desolate.

2. There he saw the reproach of Israel—and that was *the image of jealousy*, set *northward, at the gate of the altar*, *v. 3, 5*. What image this was is uncertain, probably an image of Baal, or of the grove, which Manasseh made and set in the temple (2 Kings xxi. 7, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3), which Josiah removed, but his successors, it seems, replaced there, as probably they did the *chariots of the sun* which he found at the *entering in of the house of the Lord* (2 Kings xxiii. 11), and this is here said to be *in the entry*. But the prophet, instead of telling us what image it was, which might gratify our curiosity, tells us that it was *the image of jealousy*, to convince our consciences that, whatever image it was, it was in the highest degree offensive to God and *provoked him to jealousy*. He resented it as a husband would resent the whoredoms of his wife, and would certainly revenge it; for *God is jealous, and the Lord revenges*, Nah. i. 2.

(1.) The very setting up of this image *in the house of the Lord* was enough to *provoke him to jealousy*; for it is in the matters of his worship that we are particularly told, *I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*. Those that placed this image at the *door of the inner gate*, where the people assembled, called *the gate of the altar* (*v. 5*), thereby plainly intended, [1.] To affront God, to provoke him to his face, by advancing an idol to be a rival with him for the adoration of his people, in contempt of his law and in defiance of his justice. [2.] To debauch the people, and pick them up as they were entering into the courts of the Lord's house to bring their offerings to him, and to tempt them to offer them to this image; like the adulteress Solomon describes, that *sits at the door of her house, to call passers who go right on their ways, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither*, Prov. ix. 14—16. With good reason therefore is this called *the image of jealousy*.

(2.) We may well imagine what a surprise and what a grief it was to Ezekiel to see this image in the house of God, when he was in hopes that the judgments they were under had, by this time, wrought some reformation among them; but there is more wickedness in the world, in the church, than good men think there is. And now, [1.] God appeals to him whether this was not bad enough, and a sufficient ground for God to go upon in casting off this people and abandoning them to ruin. Could he, or any one else, expect any other than *that God should go far from his sanctuary*, when there were such abominations committed there, in that very place; nay, was he not perfectly driven thence? They did these things designedly, and on purpose that he should leave his sanctuary, and so shall their doom

be; they have hereby, in effect, like the Gadarenes, desired him *to depart out of their coasts*, and therefore he will depart; he will no more dignify and protect his sanctuary, as he has done, but will give it up to reproach and ruin. But, [2.] Though this is bad enough, and serves abundantly to justify God in all that he brings upon them, yet the matter will appear to be much worse: *But turn thyself yet again, and thou wilt be amazed to see greater abominations than these*. Where there is one abomination it will be found that there are many more. Sins do not go alone.

7 And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. 8 Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door. 9 And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. 10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. 11 And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. 12 Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

We have here a further discovery of the abominations that were committed at Jerusalem, and within the confines of the temple too. Now observe,

I. How this discovery is made. God, in vision, brought Ezekiel to the *door of the court*, the outer court, along the sides of which the priests' lodgings were. God could have introduced him at first into the *chambers of imagery*, but he brings him to them by degrees, partly to employ his own industry in searching out these mysteries of iniquity, and partly to make him sensible with what care and caution those idolaters concealed their idolatries. Before the priests' apartments they had run up a wall, to make them the more private, that they might not lie open to the observation of those who passed by—a shrewd sign that they did something which they had reason to be ashamed of. *He that doeth evil hates the*



light. They were not willing that those who saw them in God's house should see them in their own, lest they should see them contradict themselves and undo in private what they did in public. But, *behold, a hole in the wall* (v. 7), a spy-hole, by which you might see that which would give cause to suspect them. When hypocrites screen themselves behind the wall of an external profession, and with it think to conceal their wickedness from the eye of the world and carry on their designs the more successfully, it is hard for them to manage it with so much art but that there is some hole or other left in the wall, something that betrays them, to those who look diligently, not to be what they pretend to be. The ass's ears in the fable appeared from under the lion's skin. This *hole in the wall* Ezekiel made wider, and *behold a door*, v. 8. This door he goes in by into the *treasury*, or some of the apartments of the priests, and sees the *wicked abominations that they do there*, v. 9. Note, Those that would discover the mystery of iniquity in others, or in themselves, must accomplish a diligent search; for Satan has his wiles, and depths, and devices, which we should not be ignorant of, and *the heart is deceitful above all things*; in the examining of it therefore we are concerned to be very strict.

II. What the discovery is. It is a very melancholy one. 1. He sees a chamber set round with idolatrous pictures (v. 10): *All the idols of the house of Israel*, which they had borrowed from the neighbouring nations, were *portrayed upon the wall round about*, even the vilest of them, *the forms of creeping things*, which they worshipped, and *beasts*, even *abominable ones*, which are poisonous and venomous; at least they were abominable when they were worshipped. This was a sort of pantheon, a collection of all the idols together which they paid their devotions to. Though the second commandment, in the letter of it, forbids only graven images, yet painted ones are as bad and as dangerous. 2. He sees this chamber filled with idolatrous worshippers (v. 11): There were *seventy men of the elders of Israel* offering incense to these painted idols. Here was a great number of idolaters strengthening one another's hands in this wickedness; though it was in a private chamber, and the meeting industriously concealed, yet here were seventy men engaged in it. I doubt these elders were many more than those in Babylon that sat before the prophet in his house, v. 1. They were *seventy men*, the number of the great Sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation, and, we have reason to fear, the same men; for they were *the ancients of the house of Israel*, not only in age, but in office, who were bound, by the duty of their place, to restrain and punish idolatry and to destroy and abolish all superstitious images wherever they found

them; yet these were those that did themselves worship them in private, so undermining that religion which in public they professed to own and promote only because by it they held their preferments. They had *every man his censer in his hand*; so fond were they of the idolatrous service that they would all be their own priests, and very prodigal they were of their perfumes in honour of these images, for *a thick cloud of incense went up*, that filled the room. O that the zeal of these idolaters might shame the worshippers of the true God out of their indifference to his service! The prophet took particular notice of one whom he knew, who *stood in the midst* of these idolaters, as chief among them, being perhaps president of the great council at this time or most forward in this wickedness. No wonder the people were corrupt when the elders were so. The sins of leaders are leading sins.

III. What the remark is that is made upon it (v. 12): "*Son of man, hast thou seen this?*" Couldst thou have imagined that there was such wickedness committed?" It is here observed concerning it, 1. That it was done *in the dark*; for sinful works are *works of darkness*. They concealed it, lest they should lose their places, or at least their credit. There is a great deal of secret wickedness in the world, which the day will declare, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. 2. That this one idolatrous chapel was but a specimen of many the like. Here they met together, to worship their images in concert, but, it should seem, they had *every man the chamber of his imagery* besides, a room in his own house for this purpose, in which every man gratified his own fancy with such pictures as he liked best. Idolaters had their household gods, and their family worship of them in private, which is a shame to those who call themselves Christians and yet have no church in their house, no worship of God in their family. Had they *chambers of imagery*, and shall not we have chambers of devotion? 3. That atheism was at the bottom of their idolatry. They worship images *in the dark*, the images of the gods of other nations, and *they say*, "*Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom we should serve, seeth us not. Jehovah hath forsaken the earth, and we may worship what God we will; he regards us not.*" (1.) They think themselves out of God's sight: *They say, The Lord seeth us not.* They imagined, because the matter was carried on so closely that men could not discover it, nor did any of their neighbours suspect them to be idolaters, that therefore it was hidden from the eye of God; as if there were any *darkness, or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*. Note, A practical disbelief of God's omniscience is at the bottom of our treacherous departures from him; but the church argues justly, as to

this very sin of idolatry (Ps. xlv. 20, 21), *If we have forgotten the name of our God, and stretched forth our hand to a strange god, will not God search this out?* No doubt he will. (2.) They think themselves out of God's care: "*The Lord has forsaken the earth, and looks not after the affairs of it; and then we may as well worship any other god as him.*" Or, "*He has forsaken our land, and left it to be a prey to its enemies; and therefore it is time for us to look out for some other god, to whom to commit the protection of it. Our one God cannot, or will not, deliver us; and therefore let us have many.*" This was a blasphemous reflection upon God, as if he had forsaken them first, else they would not have forsaken him. Note, Those are ripe indeed for ruin who have arrived at such a pitch of impudence as to lay the blame of their sins upon God himself.

13 He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, *and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do.* 14 Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD's house which *was* toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. 15 Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? turn thee yet again, *and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.* 16 And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. 17 Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. 18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, *yet* will I not hear them.

Here we have,

I. More and greater abominations discovered to the prophet. He thought that what he had seen was bad enough and yet (v. 13): *Turn thyself again, and thou shalt see yet*

*greater abominations, and greater still, v. 15,* as before, v. 6. There are those who live in retirement who do not think what wickedness there is in this world; and the more we converse with it, and the further we go abroad into it, the more corrupt we see it. When we have seen that which is bad we may have our wonder at it made to cease by the discovery of that which, upon some account or other, is a great deal worse. We shall find it so in examining our own hearts and searching into them; there is a world of iniquity in them, a great abundance and variety of abominations, and, when we have found out much amiss, still we shall find more; *for the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it perfectly?* Now the abominations here discovered were, 1. *Women weeping for Tammuz, v. 14.* An abominable thing indeed, that any should choose rather to serve an idol in tears than to serve the true God *with joyfulness and gladness of heart!* Yet such absurdities as these are those guilty of who *follow after lying vanities and forsake their own mercies.* Some think it was for Adonis, an idol among the Greeks, others for Osiris, an idol of the Egyptians, that they shed these tears. The image, they say, was made to weep, and then the worshippers wept with it. They bewailed the death of this Tammuz, and anon rejoiced in its returning to life again. These mourning women *sat at the door of the gate of the Lord's house,* and there shed their idolatrous tears, as it were in defiance of God and the sacred rites of his worship, and some think, with their idolatry, prostrating themselves also to corporeal whoredom; for these two commonly went together, and those that dishonoured the divine nature by the one were justly *given up to vile affections* and a reprobate sense to dishonour the human nature, which nowhere ever sunk so far below itself as in these idolatrous rites. 2. *Men worshipping the sun, v. 16.* And this was so much the greater an abomination that it was practised *in the inner court of the Lord's house at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar.* There, where the most sacred rites of their holy religion used to be performed, was this abominable wickedness committed. Justly might God in jealousy say to those who thus affronted him at his own door, as the king to Haman, *Will he force the queen also before me in the house?* Here *were* about twenty-five men giving that honour to the sun which is due to God only. Some think they were the king and his princes; it should rather seem that they were priests, for this was the court of the priests, and the proper place to find them in. Those that were entrusted with the true religion, had it committed to their care and were charged with the custody of it, they were the men that betrayed it. (1.) They turned *their backs towards the temple of the Lord,* resolutely forgetting it



and designedly slighting it and putting contempt upon it. Note, When men turn their backs upon God's institutions, and despise them, it is no marvel if they wander endlessly after their own inventions. Impiety is the beginning of idolatry and all iniquity. (2.) They turned *their faces towards the east, and worshipped the sun*, the rising sun. This was an ancient instance of idolatry; it is mentioned in Job's time (Job xxxi. 26), and had been generally practised among the nations, some worshipping the sun under one name, others under another. These priests, finding it had antiquity and general consent and usage on its side (the two pleas which the papists use at this day in defence of their superstitious rites, and particularly this of worshipping towards the east), practised it in the court of the temple, thinking it an omission that it was not inserted in their ritual. See the folly of idolaters in worshipping that as a god, and calling it *Baal—a lord*, which God made to be a servant to the universe (for such the sun is, and so his name *Shemesh* signifies, Deut. iv. 19), and in adoring the borrowed light and despising the *Father of lights*.

II. The inference drawn from these discoveries (v. 17): "*Hast thou seen this, O son of man!* and couldst thou have thought ever to see such things done in the temple of the Lord?" Now, 1. He appeals to the prophet himself concerning the heinousness of the crime. Can he think it is a *light thing to the house of Judah*, who know and profess better things, and are dignified with so many privileges above other nations? Is it an excusable thing in those that have God's oracles and ordinances *that they commit the abominations which they commit here?* Do not those deserve to suffer that thus sin? Should not such abominations as these *make desolate?* Dan. ix. 27. 2. He aggravates it from the fraud and oppression that were to be found in all parts of the nations: *They have filled the land with violence*. It is not strange if those that wrong God thus make no conscience of wronging one another, and with all that is sacred trample likewise upon all that is just. And their wickedness in their conversations made even the worship they paid to their own God an abomination (Isa. i. 11, &c.): "*They fill the land with violence*, and then they return to the temple *to provoke me to anger* there; for even their sacrifices, instead of making an atonement, do but add to their guilt. *They return to provoke me* (they repeat the provocation, do it, and do it again), *and, lo, they put the branch to their nose*"—a proverbial expression denoting perhaps their scoffing at God and having him in derision; they snuffed at his service, as men do when they *put a branch to their nose*. Or it was some custom used by idolaters in honour of the idols they served. We read of garlands used in their idolatrous worships (Acts xiv. 13), out of

which every zealot took a branch which they smelled to as a nosegay. Dr. Lightfoot (*Hor. Heb. in John xv. 6*) gives another sense of this place: *They put the branch to their wrath*, or *to his wrath*, as the Masorites read it; that is, they are still bringing more fuel (such as the withered branches of the vine) to the fire of divine wrath, which they have already kindled, as if that wrath did not burn hot enough already. Or putting the branch to the nose may signify the giving of a very great affront and provocation either to God or man; they are an abusive generation of men. 3. He passes sentence upon them that they shall be utterly cut off: *Therefore*, because they are thus furiously bent upon sin, *I will also deal in fury* with them, v. 18. *They filled the land with their violence*, and God will fill it with the violence of their enemies; and he will not lend a favourable ear to the suggestions either, (1.) Of his own pity: *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity*; repentance shall be hidden from his eyes; or, (2.) Of their prayers: *Though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them*; for still their sins cry more loudly for vengeance than their prayers cry for mercy. God will now be as deaf to their prayers as their own idols were, on whom they cried aloud, but in vain, 1 Kings xviii. 26. Time was when God was ready to hear even *before they cried* and *to answer while they were yet speaking*; but now *they shall seek me early and not find me*, Prov. i. 28. It is not the loud voice, but the upright heart, that God will regard.

#### CHAP. IX.

The prophet had, in vision, seen the wickedness that was committed at Jerusalem, in the foregoing chapter, and we may be sure that it was not represented to him worse than really it was; now here follows, of course, a representation of their ruin approaching; for when sin goes before judgments come next. Here is, I. Preparation made of instruments that were to be employed in the destruction of the city, ver. 1, 2. II. The removal of the Shechinah from the cherubim to the threshold of the temple, ver. 3. III. Orders given to one of the persons employed, who is distinguished from the rest, for the marking of a remnant to be preserved from the common destruction, ver. 3, 4. IV. The warrant signed for the execution of those that were not marked, and the execution begun accordingly, ver. 5—7. V. The prophet's intercession for the mitigation of the sentence, and a denial of any mitigation, the decree having now gone forth, ver. 8—10. VI. The report made by him that was to mark the pious remnant of what he had done in that matter, ver. 11. And this shows a usual method of Providence in the government of the world.

HE cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man *with his destroying weapon in his hand*. 2 And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them *was clothed with linen*, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. 3 And the glory of the God of Israel

was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which *had* the writer's inkhorn by his side; 4 And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

In these verses we have,

I. The summons given to Jerusalem's destroyers to come forth and give their attendance. He that appeared to the prophet (*ch. viii. 2*), that had brought him to Jerusalem and had shown the wickedness that was done there, *he cried, Cause those that have charge over the city to draw near* (*v. 1*), or, as it might better be read, and nearer the original, *Those that have charge over the city are drawing near*. He had said (*ch. viii. 18*), *I will deal in fury*; now, says he to the prophet, thou shalt see who are to be employed as the instruments of my wrath. *Appropinquaverunt visitationes civitatis*—The visitations (or visitors) of the city are at hand. They would not know the day of their visitations in mercy, and now they are to be visited in wrath. Observe, 1. How the notice of this is given to the prophet: *He cried it in my ears with a loud voice*, which intimates the vehemency of him that spoke; when men are highly provoked, and threaten in anger, they speak aloud. Those that regard not the counsels God gives them in a still small voice shall be made to hear the threatenings, to hear and tremble. It denotes also the prophet's unwillingness to be told this; he was deaf on that ear, but there is no remedy, their sin will not admit an excuse and therefore their judgment will not admit a delay: "*He cried it in my ears with a loud voice*; he made me hear it, and I heard it with a sad heart." 2. What this notice is. There are those *that have charge over the city* to destroy it, not the Chaldean armies, they are to be indeed employed in this work, but they are not the visitors, they are only the servants, or tools rather. God's angels have received a charge now to lay that city waste, which they had long had a charge to protect and watch over. They are at hand, as destroying angels, as ministers of wrath, for every man has his destroying weapon in his hand, as the angel that kept the way of the tree of life with a flaming sword. Note, Those that have by sin made God their enemy have made the good angels their enemies too. These visitors are called and *caused to draw near*. Note, God has ministers of wrath always within call, always at command, invisible powers, by whom he ac-

complishes his purposes. The prophet is made to see this in vision, that he might with the greater assurance in his preaching denounce these judgments. God told it him with a loud voice, *taught it him with a strong hand* (*Isa. viii. 11*), that it might make the deeper impression upon him and that he might thus proclaim it in the people's ears.

II. Their appearance, upon this summons, is recorded. Immediately *six men came* (*v. 2*), one for each of the principal gates of Jerusalem. Two destroying angels were sent against Sodom, but six against Jerusalem; for Jerusalem's doom in the judgment will be thrice as heavy as that of Sodom. There is an angel watching at every gate to destroy, to bring in judgments from every quarter, and to take heed that none escape. One angel served to destroy the first-born of Egypt, and the camp of the Assyrians, but here are six. In the Revelation we find seven that were to *pour out the vials of God's wrath*, *Rev. xvi. 1*. They came with every one a *slaughter-weapon in his hand*, prepared for the work to which they were called. The nations of which the king of Babylon's army was composed, which some reckon to be six, and the commanders of his army (of whom *six* are named as principal, *Jer. xxxix. 3*), may be called the *slaughter-weapons* in the hands of the angels. The angels are thoroughly furnished for every service. 1. Observe whence they came—from the way of the higher gate, which lies towards the north (*v. 2*), either because the Chaldeans came from the north (*Jer. i. 14*, *Out of the north an evil shall break forth*) or because the image of jealousy was set up at the door of the inner gate that looks towards the north, *ch. viii. 3, 5*. At that gate of the temple the destroying angels entered, to show what it was that opened the door to them. Note, That way that sin lies judgments may be expected to come. 2. Observe where they placed themselves: *They went in and stood beside the brazen altar*, on which sacrifices were wont to be offered and atonement made. When they acted as destroyers they acted as sacrificers, not from any personal revenge or ill-will, but with a pure and sincere regard to the glory of God; for to his justice all they slew were offered up as victims. *They stood by the altar*, as it were to protect and vindicate that, and plead its righteous cause, and avenge the horrid profanation of it. At the altar they were to receive their commission to destroy, to intimate that the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was not to be purged by sacrifice.

III. The notice taken of one among the destroying angels distinguished in his habit from the rest, from whom some favour might be expected; it should seem he was not one of the six, but among them, to see that mercy was mixed with judgment, *v. 2*. This man was clothed with linen, as the priests were,



and he had a *writer's inkhorn* hanging at his side, as anciently attorneys and lawyers' clerks had, which he was to make use of, as the other six were to make use of their *destroying weapons*. Here the honours of the pen exceeded those of the sword; they were angels that bore the sword, but he was the Lord of angels that made use of the *writer's inkhorn*; for it is generally agreed, among the best interpreters, that this man represented Christ as Mediator saving those that are his from the flaming sword of divine justice. He is our *high priest*, clothed with holiness, for that was signified by the *fine linen*, Rev. xix. 8. As prophet he wears the *writer's inkhorn*. The book of life is the Lamb's book. The great things of the law and gospel which God has written to us are of his writing; for it is the Spirit of Christ, in the writers of the scripture, that testifies to us, and the Bible is *the revelation of Jesus Christ*. Note, It is a matter of great comfort to all good Christians that, in the midst of the destroyers and the destructions that are abroad, there is a Mediator, a great high priest, who has an interest in heaven, and whom saints on earth have an interest in.

IV. The removal of the appearance of the divine glory from over the cherubim. Some think this was that usual display of the divine glory which was between the cherubim over the mercy seat, in the most holy place, that took leave of them now, and never returned; for it is supposed that it was not in the second temple. Others think it was that display of the divine glory which the prophet now saw over the cherubim in vision; and this is more probable, because this is called *the glory of the God of Israel* (ch. viii. 4), and this is it which he had now his eye upon; this was gone to *the threshold of the house*, as it were to call to the servants that attended without the door, to send them on their errand and give them their instructions. And the removal of this, as well as the former, might be significant of God's departure from them, and leaving them their house desolate; and when God goes all good goes, but he goes from none till they first drive him from them. He went at first no further than *the threshold*, that he might show how loth he was to depart, and might give them both time and encouragement to invite his return to them and his stay with them. Note, God's departures from a people are gradual, but gracious souls are soon aware of the first step he takes towards a remove. Ezekiel immediately observed that *the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub*; and what is a vision of angels if God be gone?

V. The charge given to the man clothed in linen to secure the pious remnant from the general desolation. We do not read that this Saviour was summoned and sent for, as the destroyers were; for he is always

ready, *appearing in the presence of God for us*; and to him, as the most proper person, the care of those that are marked for salvation is committed, v. 4. Now observe, 1. The distinguishing character of this remnant that is to be saved. They are such as *sigh and cry*, sigh in themselves, as men in pain and distress, cry to God in prayer, as men in earnest, because of *all the abominations that are committed in Jerusalem*. It was not only the idolatries they were guilty of, but all their other enormities, that were abominations to God. These pious few had witnessed against those abominations and had done what they could in their places to suppress them; but, finding all their attempts for the reformation of manners fruitless, they sat down, and *sighed, and cried*, wept in secret, and complained to God, because of the dishonour done to his name by their wickedness and the ruin it was bringing upon their church and nation. Note, It is not enough that we do not delight in the sins of others, and that we have not fellowship with them, but we must mourn for them, and lay them to heart; we must grieve for that which we cannot help, as those that hate sin for its own sake, and have a tender concern for the souls of others, as David (Ps. cxix. 136), and Lot, who *veiled his righteous soul* with the wicked conversation of his neighbours. The abominations committed in Jerusalem are to be in a special manner lamented, because they are in a particular manner offensive to God.

2. The distinguishing care taken of them. Orders are given to find those all out that are of such a pious public spirit: "*Go through the midst of the city* in quest of them, and though they are ever so much dispersed, and ever so closely hid from the fury of their persecutors, yet see that you discover them, and set a mark upon their foreheads," (1.) To signify that God owns them for his, and he will confess them another day. A work of grace in the soul is to God a *mark upon the forehead*, which he will acknowledge as his mark, and by which he knows those that are his. (2.) To give to them who are thus marked an assurance of God's favour, that they may know it themselves; and the comfort of knowing it will be the most powerful support and cordial in calamitous times. Why should we perplex ourselves about this temporal life if we know by the mark that we have eternal life? (3.) To be a direction to the destroyers whom to pass by, as the blood upon the door-posts was an indication that that was an Israelite's house, and the first-born there must not be slain. Note, Those who keep themselves pure in times of common iniquity God will keep safe in times of common calamity. Those that distinguish themselves shall be distinguished; those that cry for other men's sins shall not need to cry for their own afflictions, for they shall be either

delivered from them or comforted under them. God will set a mark upon his mourners, will book their sighs and bottle their tears. *The sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads* mentioned Rev. vii. 3 was the same token of the care God has of his own people with this related here; only this was to secure them from being destroyed, that from being seduced, which is equivalent.

5 And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: 6 Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. 7 And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city. 8 And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? 9 Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not. 10 And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. 11 And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.

In these verses we have,

I. A command given to the destroyers to do execution according to their commission. *They stood by the brazen altar*, waiting for orders; and orders are here given them to cut off and destroy all that were either guilty of, or accessory to, the abominations of Jerusalem, and that did not sigh and cry for them. Note, When God has gathered his wheat into his garner nothing remains but to burn up the chaff, Matt. iii. 12.

1. They are ordered to destroy all, (1.) Without exception. They must go through the city, and smite; they must slay utterly,

slay to destruction, give them their death's wound. They must make no distinction of age or sex, but cut off old and young; neither the beauty of the virgins, nor the innocency of the babes, shall secure them. This was fulfilled in the death of multitudes by famine and pestilence, especially by the sword of the Chaldeans, as far as the military execution went. Sometimes even such bloody work as this has been God's work. But what an evil thing is sin, then, which provokes the God of infinite mercy to such severity! (2.) Without compassion: "Let not your eye spare, neither have you pity (v. 5); you must not save any whom God has doomed to destruction, as Saul did Agag and the Amalekites, for that is doing the work of God deceitfully, Jer. xlviii. 10. None need to be more merciful than God is; and he had said (ch. viii. 18), *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity*. Note, Those that live in sin, and hate to be reformed, will perish in sin, and deserve not to be pitied; for they might easily have prevented the ruin, and would not.

2. They are warned not to do the least hurt to those that were marked for salvation: "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark; do not so much as threaten or frighten any of them; it is promised them that there shall no evil come nigh them, and therefore you must keep at a distance from them." The king of Babylon gave particular orders that Jeremiah should be protected. Baruch and Ebed-melech were secured, and, it is likely, others of Jeremiah's friends, for his sake. God had promised that it should go well with his remnant and they should be well treated (Jer. xv. 11); and we have reason to think that none of the mourning praying remnant fell by the sword of the Chaldeans, but that God found out some way or other to secure them all, as, in the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the Christians were all secured in a city called Pella, and none of them perished with the unbelieving Jews. Note, None of those shall be lost whom God has marked for life and salvation; for the foundation of God stands sure.

3. They are directed to begin at the sanctuary (v. 6), that sanctuary which, in the chapter before, he had seen the horrid profanation of; they must begin there because there the wickedness began which provoked God to send these judgments. The debaucheries of the priests were the poisoning of the springs, to which all the corruption of the streams was owing. The wickedness of the sanctuary was of all wickedness the most offensive to God, and therefore there the slaughter must begin: "Begin there, to try if the people will take warning by the judgments of God upon their priests, and will repent and reform; begin there, that all the world may see and know that the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God, and hates sin most in those that are nearest to him."



Note, When judgments are abroad they commonly begin at the house of God, 1 Pet. iv. 17. *You only have I known, and therefore I will punish you*, Amos iii. 2. God's temple is a sanctuary, a refuge and protection for penitent sinners, but not for any that go on still in their trespasses; neither the sacredness of the place nor the eminency of their place in it will be their security. It should seem the destroyers made some difficulty of putting men to death in the temple, but God bids them not hesitate at that, but (v. 7), *Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain*. They will not be taken from the altar (as was appointed by the law, Exod. xxi. 14), but think to secure themselves by keeping hold of the horns of it, like Joab, and therefore, like him, let them die there, 1 Kings ii. 30, 31. There the blood of one of God's prophets had been shed (Matt. xxiii. 35) and therefore let their blood be shed. Note, If the servants of God's house defile it with their idolatries, God will justly suffer the enemies of it to defile it with their violences, Ps. lxxix. 1. But these acts of necessary justice were really, whatever they were ceremonially, rather a purification than a pollution of the sanctuary; it was putting away evil from among them.

4. They are appointed to go forth into the city, v. 6, 7. Note, Wherever sin has gone before judgment will follow after; and, though judgment begins at the house of God, yet it shall not end there. The holy city shall be no more a protection to the wicked people than the holy house was to the wicked priests.

II. Here is execution done accordingly. They observed their orders, and, 1. *They began at the elders, the ancient men that were before the house*, and slew them first, either those seventy ancients who worshipped idols in their chambers (ch. viii. 12) or those twenty-five who worshipped the sun between the porch and the altar, who might more properly be said to be before the house. Note, Ringleaders in sin may expect to be first met with by the judgments of God; and the sins of those who are in the most eminent and public stations call for the most exemplary punishments. 2. They proceeded to the common people: *They went forth and slew in the city*; for, when the decree has gone forth, there shall be no delay; if God begin, he will make an end.

III. Here is the prophet's intercession for a mitigation of the judgment, and a reprieve for some (v. 8): *While they were slaying them, and I was left, I fell upon my face*. Observe here, 1. How sensible the prophet was of God's mercy to him, in that he was spared when so many round about him were cut off. *Thousands fell on his right hand, and on his left, and yet the destruction did not come nigh him; only with his eyes did he behold the just reward of the wicked*, Ps. xci. 7, 8. He speaks as one that narrowly es-

caped the destruction, attributing it to God's goodness, not his own deserts. Note, The best saints must acknowledge themselves indebted to sparing mercy that they are not consumed. And when desolating judgments are abroad, and multitudes fall by them, it ought to be accounted a great favour if we have our lives given us for a prey; for we might justly have perished with those that perish. 2. Observe how he improved this mercy; he looked upon it that therefore he was left that he might stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God. Note, We must look upon it that for this reason we are spared, that we may do good in our places, may do good by our prayers. Ezekiel did not triumph in the slaughter he made, but his flesh trembled for fear of God (as David's, Ps. cxix. 120); he fell on his face, and cried, not in fear for himself (he was one of those that were marked), but in compassion to his fellow-creatures. Those that sigh and cry for the sins of sinners cannot but sigh and cry for their miseries too; yet the day is coming when all this concern will be entirely swallowed up in a full satisfaction in this, that God is glorified; and those that now fall on their faces, and cry, *Ah! Lord God, will lift up their heads, and sing, Hallelujah*, Rev. xix. 1, 3. The prophet humbly expostulates with God: *"Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel, and shall there be none left but the few that are marked? Shall the Israel of God be destroyed, utterly destroyed? When there are but a few left shall those few be cut off, who might have been the seed of another generation? And will the God of Israel be himself their destroyer? Wilt thou now destroy Israel, who wast wont to protect and deliver Israel? Wilt thou so pour out thy fury upon Jerusalem as by the total destruction of the city to ruin the whole country too? Surely thou wilt not!"* Note, Though we acknowledge that God is righteous, yet we have leave to plead with him concerning his judgments, Jer. xii. 1.

IV. Here is God's denial of the prophet's request for a mitigation of the judgment and his justification of himself in that denial, v. 9, 10. 1. Nothing could be said in extenuation of this sin. God was as willing to show mercy as the prophet could desire; he always is so. But here the case will not admit of it; it is such that mercy cannot be granted without wrong to justice; and it is not fit that one attribute of God should be glorified at the expense of another. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that he should destroy, especially that he should destroy Israel? By no means. But the truth is their crimes are so flagrant that the reprieve of the sinners would be a connivance at the sin: *"The iniquity of the house of Judah and Israel is exceedingly great; there is no suffering them to go on at this rate. The land is filled with innocent blood, and, when the*

city courts are appealed to for the defence of injured innocency, the remedy is as bad as the disease, for the city is full of perverseness, or *wresting of judgment*; and that which they support themselves with in this iniquity is the same atheistical profane principle with which they flattered themselves in their idolatry, *ch. viii. 12. The Lord has forsaken the earth*, and left it to us to do what we will in it; he will not intermeddle in the affairs of it; and, whatever wrong we do, he *sees not*; he either knows it not, or will not take cognizance of it." Now how can those expect benefit by the mercy of God who thus bid defiance to his justice? No; nothing can be offered by an advocate in excuse of the crimes while the criminal puts in such a plea as this in his own vindication; and therefore, 2. Nothing can be done to mitigate the sentence (*v. 10*): "*Whatever thou thinkest of it, as for me, my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity*; I have borne with them as long as it was fit that such impudent sinners should be borne with; and therefore now *I will recompense their way on their head*." Note, Sinners sink and perish under the weight of their own sins; it is their own way, which they deliberately chose rather than the way of God, and which they obstinately persisted in, in contempt of the word of God, that is *recompensed* on them. Great iniquities justify God in great severities; nay, he is ready to justify himself, as he does here to the prophet, for he will be clear when he judges.

V. Here is a return made of the writ of protection which was issued out for the securing of those that mourned in Zion (*v. 11*): *The man clothed with linen reported the matter*, gave an account of what he had done in pursuance of his commission; he had found out all that mourned in secret for the sins of the land, and cried out against them by a public testimony, and had marked them all in the forehead. *Lord, I have done as thou hast commanded me*. We do not find that those who were commissioned to destroy reported what destruction they had made, but he who was appointed to protect reported his matter; for it would be more pleasing both to God and to the prophet to hear of those that were saved than of those that perished. Or this report was made now because the thing was finished, whereas the destroying work would be a work of time, and when it was brought to an end then the report should be made. See how faithful Christ is to the trust reposed in him. Is he commanded to secure eternal life to the chosen remnant? He has done as was commanded him. *Of all that thou hast given me I have lost none*.

## CHAP. X.

The prophet had observed to us (*ch. viii. 4*) that when he was in vision at Jerusalem he saw the same appearance of the glory of God there that he had seen by the river Chebar; now, in this chapter, he gives us some account of the appearance there, as far as was requisite for the clearing up of two further indications of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, which God here gave the

prophet:—1. The scattering of the coals of fire upon the city, which were taken from between the cherubim, *ver. 1—7*. 11. The removal of the glory of God from the temple, and its being upon the wing to be gone, *ver. 8—22*. When God goes out from a people all judgments break in upon them.

THEN I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire-stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. 2 And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, *even* under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. 3 Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD's glory. 5 And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard *even* to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. 6 And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside the wheels. 7 And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out.

To inspire us with a holy awe and dread of God, and to fill us with his fear, we may observe, in this part of the vision which the prophet had,

1. The glorious appearance of his majesty. Something of the invisible world is here made visible, some faint representations of its brightness and beauty, some shadows, but such as are no more to be compared with the truth and substance than a picture with the life; yet here is enough to oblige us all to the utmost reverence in our thoughts of God and approaches to him, if we will but admit the impressions this discovery of him will make. 1. He is here in the *firmament above the head of the cherubim, v. 1*. He manifests his glory in the upper world, where purity and brightness are both in perfection;



and the vast expanse of the firmament aims to speak the God that dwells there infinite. It is the firmament of his power and of his prospect too; for thence he beholds all the children of men. The divine nature infinitely transcends the angelic nature, and God is above the head of the cherubim, in respect not only of his dignity above them, but of his dominion over them. Cherubim have great power, and wisdom, and influence, but they are all subject to God and Christ. 2. He is here upon the throne, or that which had the appearance of the likeness of a throne (for God's glory and government infinitely transcend all the brightest ideas our minds can either form or receive concerning them); and it was as it were a sapphire-stone, pure and sparkling; such a throne has God prepared in the heavens, far exceeding the thrones of any earthly potentates. 3. He is here attended with a glorious train of holy angels. When God came into his temple the cherubim stood on the right side of the house (v. 3), as the prince's life-guard, attending the gate of his palace. Christ has angels at command. The orders given to all the angels of God are, to worship him. Some observe that they stood on the right side of the house, that is, the south side, because on the north side the image of jealousy was, and other instances of idolatry, from which they would place themselves at as great a distance as might be. 4. The appearance of his glory is veiled with a cloud, and yet out of that cloud darts forth a dazzling lustre; in the house and inner court there was a cloud and darkness, which filled them, and yet either the outer court, or the same court after some time, was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory, v. 3, 4. There was a darting forth of light and brightness; but, if any over curious eye pried into it, it would find itself lost in a cloud. His righteousness is conspicuous as the great mountains, and the brightness of it fills the court; but his judgments are a great deep, which we cannot fathom, a cloud which we cannot see through. The brightness discovers enough to awe and direct our consciences, but the cloud forbids us to expect the gratifying of our curiosity; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. Thus (Hab. iii. 4) he had rays coming out of his hand, and yet there was the hiding of his power. Nothing is more clear than that God is, nothing more dark than what he is. God covers himself with light, and yet, as to us, makes darkness his pavilion. God took possession of the tabernacle and temple in a cloud, which was always the symbol of his presence. In the temple above there will be no cloud, but we shall see face to face. 5. The cherubim made a dreadful sound with their wings, v. 5. The vibration of them, as of the strings of musical instruments, made a curious melody; bees, and other winged insects, make a noise with their wings. Probably this intimated their pre-

paring to remove, by stretching forth and lifting up their wings, which made this noise as it were to give warning of it. This noise is said to be as the voice of the almighty God when he speaks, as the thunder, which is called the voice of the Lord (Ps. xxix. 3), or as the voice of the Lord when he spoke to Israel on Mount Sinai; and therefore he then gave the law with abundance of terror, to signify with what terror he would reckon for the violation of it, which he was now about to do. This noise of their wings was heard even to the outer court, the court of the people; for the Lord's voice, in his judgments, cries in the city, which those may hear that do not, as Ezekiel, see the visions of them.

II. The terrible directions of his wrath. This vision has a further tendency than merely to set forth the divine grandeur; further orders are to be given for the destruction of Jerusalem. The greatest devastations are made by fire and sword. For a general slaughter of the inhabitants of Jerusalem orders were given in the foregoing chapter; now here we have a command to lay the city in ashes, by scattering coals of fire upon it, which in the vision were fetched from between the cherubim.

1. For the issuing out of orders to do this the glory of the Lord was lifted up from the cherub (as in the chapter before for the giving of orders there, v. 3) and stood upon the threshold of the house, in imitation of the courts of judgment, which they kept in the gates of their cities. The people would not hear the oracles which God delivered to them from his holy temple, and therefore they shall thence be made to hear their doom.

2. The man clothed in linen who had marked those that were to be preserved is to be employed in this service; for the same Jesus that is the protector and Saviour of those that believe, having all judgment committed to him, that of condemnation as well as that of absolution, will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on those that obey not his gospel. He that sits on the throne calls to the man clothed in linen to go in between the wheels, and fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. This intimates, (1.) That the burning of the city and temple by the Chaldeans was a consumption determined, and that therein they executed God's counsel, did what he designed before should be done. (2.) That the fire of divine wrath, which kindles judgment upon a people, is just and holy, for it is fire fetched from between the cherubim. The fire on God's altar, where atonement was made, had been slighted, to avenge which fire is here fetched from heaven, like that by which Nadab and Abihu were killed for offering strange fire. If a city, or town, or house, be burnt, whether by design or accident, if we trace it in its original, we shall find that the coals which kindled the fire came from between the wheels;

for there is not any evil of that kind in the city, but the Lord has done it. (3.) That Jesus Christ acts by commission from the Father, for from him he receives authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Christ came to send fire on the earth (Luke xii. 49) and in the great day will speak this world into ashes. By fire from his hand, the earth, and all the works that are therein, will be burnt up.

3. This man clothed with linen readily attended to this service; though, being clothed with linen, he was very unfit to go among the burning coals, yet, being called, he said, *Lo, I come*; this commandment he had received of his Father, and he complied with it; the prophet saw him go in, v. 2. *He went in, and stood beside the wheels*, expecting to be furnished there with the coals he was to scatter; for what Christ was to give he first received, whether for mercy or judgment. He was directed to take fire, but he staid till he had it given him, to show how slow he is to execute judgment, and how long-suffering to us-ward.

4. One of the cherubim reached him a handful of fire from the midst of the living creatures. The prophet, when he first saw this vision, observed that there were burning coals of fire, and lamps, that went up and down among the living creatures (ch. i. 13); thence this fire was taken, v. 7. The spirit of burning, the refiner's fire, by which Christ purifies his church, is of a divine original. It is by a celestial fire, fire from between the cherubim, that wonders are wrought. The cherubim put it into his hand; for the angels are ready to be employed by the Lord Jesus and to serve all his purposes.

5. When he had taken the fire he went out, no doubt to scatter it up and down upon the city, as he was directed. And who can abide the day of his coming? Who can stand before him when he goes out in his anger?

8 And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. 9 And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl-stone. 10 And as for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel. 11 When they went, they went upon their four sides; they turned not as they went, but to the place whither the head looked they followed it; they turned not as they went. 12 And their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full

of eyes round about, even the wheels that they four had. 13 As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel. 14 And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. 15 And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. 16 And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. 17 When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them. 18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. 19 And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. 20 This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims. 21 Every one had four faces a-piece, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. 22 And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.

We have here a further account of the vision of God's glory which Ezekiel saw, here intended to introduce that direful omen of the departure of that glory from them, which would open the door for ruin to break in.

1. Ezekiel sees the glory of God shining in the sanctuary, as he had seen it by the river of Chebar, and gives an account of it, that those who had by their wickedness provoked God to depart from them might know what they had lost and might lament after the Lord, groaning out their Ichabod, *Where is the glory?* Ezekiel here sees the opera-



tions of divine Providence in the government of the lower world, and the affairs of it, represented by the *four wheels*; and the perfections of the holy angels, the inhabitants of the upper world, and their ministrations, represented by the *four living creatures*, every one of which had *four faces*. The agency of the angels in directing the affairs of this world is represented by the close communication that was between the *living creatures* and the *wheels*, the wheels being guided by them in all their motions, as the chariot is by him that drives it. But the same Spirit being both in the *living creatures* and in the *wheels* denotes that infinite wisdom which serves its own purposes by the ministration of angels and all the occurrences of this lower world. So that this vision gives our faith a view of that throne which the Lord has *prepared in the heavens*, and that kingdom of his which *rules over all*, Ps. ciii. 19. The prophet observes that this was the *same vision* with that he saw by the river of Chebar (v. 15, 22), and yet in one thing there seems to be a material difference, that that which was there the *face of an ox*, and was on the *left side* (ch. i. 10), is here the *face of a cherub*, and is the *first face* (v. 14), whence some have concluded that the peculiar face of a cherub was that of an ox, which the Israelites had an eye to when they made the golden calf. I rather think that in this latter vision the first face was the proper appearance or figure of a cherub, which Ezekiel knew very well, being a priest, by what he had seen in the temple of the Lord (1 Kings vi. 29), but which we now have no certainty of at all; and by this Ezekiel knew assuredly, whereas before he only conjectured it, that they were all cherubim, though putting on different faces, v. 20. And this first appearing in the proper figure of a cherub, and yet it being proper to retain the number of four, that of the ox is left out and dropped, because the face of the cherubim had been most abused by the worship of an ox. As sometimes when God appeared to deliver his people, so now when he appeared to depart from them, *he rode upon a cherub, and did fly*. Now observe here, 1. That this world is subject to turns, and changes, and various revolutions. The course of affairs in it is represented by *wheels* (v. 9); sometimes one spoke is uppermost and sometimes another; they are still ebbing and flowing like the sea, waxing and waning like the moon, 1 Sam. ii. 4, &c. Nay, their appearance is as if there were a *wheel in the midst of a wheel* (v. 10), which intimates the mutual references of providences to each other, their dependences on each other, and the joint tendency of all to one common end, while their motions as to us are intricate, and perplexed, and seemingly contrary. 2. That there is an admirable harmony and uniformity in the various occurrences of providence (v. 13): *As for the wheels*, though they

moved several ways, yet *it was cried to them, O wheel!* they were all as one, being guided by one Spirit to one end; for God works all according to the counsel of his own will, which is one, for his own glory, which is one. And this makes the disposals of Providence truly admirable, and to be looked upon with wonder. As the works of his creation, considered separately, were *good*, but all together *very good*, so the wheels of Providence, considered by themselves, are wonderful, but put them together and they are very wonderful. *O wheel!* 3. That the motions of Providence are steady and regular, and whatever the Lord pleases that he does and is never put upon new counsels. *The wheels turned not as they went* (v. 11), and the *living creatures went every one straight forward*, v. 22. Whatever difficulties lay in their way, they were sure to get over them, and were never obliged to stand still, turn aside, or go back. So perfectly known to God are all his works that he is never put upon new counsels. 4. That God makes more use of the ministration of angels in the government of this lower world than we are aware of: *The four wheels were by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by another cherub*, v. 9. What has been imagined by some concerning the spheres above, that every orb has its intelligence to guide it, is here intimated concerning the wheels below, that every wheel has its cherub to guide it. We think it a satisfaction to us if under the wise God there are wise men employed in managing the affairs of kingdoms and churches; whether there be so or no, it appears by this that there are wise angels employed, *a cherub to every wheel*. 5. That all the motions of Providence and all the ministrations of angels are under the government of the great God. They are all *full of eyes*, those eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the earth and which the angels have always an eye to, v. 12. The *living creatures* and the *wheels* concur in their motions and rests (v. 17); for the *Spirit of life*, as it may be read, or the *Spirit of the living creatures*, is in the *wheels*. The Spirit of God directs all the creatures, both upper and lower, so as to make them serve the divine purpose. Events are not determined by the *wheel of fortune*, which is blind, but by the *wheels of Providence*, which are full of eyes.

II. Ezekiel sees the glory of God removing out of the sanctuary, the place where God's honour had long dwelt, and this sight is as sad as the other was grateful. It was pleasant to see that God had not *forsaken the earth* (as the idolaters suggested, ch. ix. 9), but sad to see that he was forsaking his sanctuary. The *glory of the Lord stood over the threshold*, v. 4. But now it *departed from off the threshold*, having thence given the necessary orders for the destruction of the city, and it *stood over the cherubim*, not

## CHAP. XI.

those in the most holy place, but those that Ezekiel now saw in vision, v. 18. It ascended that stately chariot, as the judge, when he comes off the bench, goes into his coach and is gone. And immediately *the cherubim lifted up their wings* (v. 19), as they were directed, and they *mounted up from the earth*, as birds upon the wing; and, when they went out, the wheels of this chariot were not drawn, but went by instinct, beside them, by which it appeared that *the Spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels*. Thus, when God is leaving a people in displeasure, angels above, and all events here below, shall concur to further his departure. But observe here, In the courts of the temple where the people of Israel had dishonoured their God, had cast off his yoke and withdrawn the shoulder from it, blessed angels appear very ready to serve him, to draw in his chariot, and to *mount upwards* with it. God had shown the prophet how the will of God was disobeyed by men on earth (ch. viii.); here he shows him how readily it is obeyed by angels and inferior creatures; and it is a comfort to us, when we grieve for the wickedness of the wicked, to think how his angels do his commandments, *hearkening to the voice of his word*, Ps. ciii. 20. Let us now, 1. Take a view of this chariot in which *the glory of the God of Israel rides triumphantly*. He that is the God of Israel is the God of heaven and earth, and has the command of all the powers of both. Let the faithful Israelites comfort themselves with this, that he who is their God is above the cherubim; their Redeemer is so (1 Pet. iii. 22) and has the sole and sovereign disposal of all events; *the living creatures and the wheels* agree to serve him, so that he is *head over all things to the church*. The rabbin call this vision that Ezekiel had *Mercabah*—the *vision of the chariot*; and thence they call the more abstruse part of divinity, which treats concerning God and spirits, *Opus currûs*—*The work of the chariot*, as they do the other part, that is more plain and familiar, *Opus bere-shith*—*The work of the creation*.—2. Let us attend the motions of this chariot: *The cherubim, and the glory of God above them, stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house*, ready to depart and leave the house, v. 19. But observe with how many stops and pauses God departs, as loth to go, as if to see if there be any that will intercede with him to return. None of the priests in the inner court, between the temple and the altar, would court his stay; therefore he leaves their court, and stands at the *east gate*, which led into the *court of the people*, to see if any of them would yet at length stand in the gap. Note, God removes by degrees from a provoking people; and, when he is ready to depart in displeasure, would return to them in mercy if they were but a repenting praying people.

This chapter concludes the vision which Ezekiel saw, and this part of it furnishes him with two messages:—1. A message of wrath against those who continued still at Jerusalem, and were there in the height of presumption, thinking they should never fall, ver. 1—13. 2. A message of comfort to those who were carried captives into Babylon and were there in the depth of despondency, thinking they should never rise. And, as the former are assured that God has judgments in store for them notwithstanding their present security, so the latter are assured that God has mercy in store for them notwithstanding their present distress, ver. 14—21. And so the glory of God removes further, ver. 22, 23. The vision disappears (ver. 24), and Ezekiel faithfully gives his hearers an account of it, ver. 25.

**M**OREOVER the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the LORD's house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. 2 Then said he unto me, Son of man, these *are* the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city: 3 Which say, *It is not near*; let us build houses: *this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh*. 4 Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man. 5 And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, *every one of them*. 6 Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain. 7 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Your slain whom ye have laid in the midst of it, they *are* the flesh, and this *city is* the caldron: but I will bring you forth out of the midst of it. 8 Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord God. 9 And I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you. 10 Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 11 This *city* shall not be your caldron, neither shall ye be the flesh in the midst thereof; *but* I will judge you in the border of Israel: 12 And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD: for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the



heathen that are round about you. 13 And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?

We have here,

I. The great security of the princes of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the judgments of God that were upon them. The prophet was brought, in vision, to the gate of the temple where these princes sat in council upon the present arduous affairs of the city: *The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me to the east gate of the Lord's house, and behold twenty-five men were there.* See how obsequious the prophet was to the Spirit's orders and how observant of all the discoveries that were made to him. It should seem, these twenty-five men were not the same with those twenty-five whom he saw at the door of the temple, *worshipping towards the east* (ch. viii. 16); those seem to have been priests or Levites, for they were between the porch and the altar, but these were princes sitting in the gate of the Lord's house, to try causes (Jer. xxvi. 10), and they are here charged, not with corruptions in worship, but with mal-administration in the government; two of them are named, because they were the most leading active men, and perhaps because the prophet knew them, though he had been some years absent—*Pelatiah* and *Jaazaniah*, not that mentioned ch. viii. 11, for he was the son of *Shaphan*, this is the son of *Azur*. Some tell us that Jerusalem was divided into twenty-four wards, and that these were the governors or aldermen of those wards, with their mayor or president. Now observe, 1. The general character which God gives of these men to the prophet (v. 2): "*These are the men that devise mischief*"; under pretence of concerting measures for the public safety they harden people in their sins, and take off their fear of God's judgments which they are threatened with by the prophets; they *give wicked counsel in this city*, counselling them to restrain and silence the prophets, to rebel against the king of Babylon, and to resolve upon holding the city out to the last extremity." Note, It is bad with a people when the things that belong to their peace are hidden from the eyes of those who are entrusted with their counsels. And, when mischief is done, God knows at whose door to lay it, and, in the day of discovery and recompence, will be sure to lay it at the right door, and will say, *These are the men that devised it*, though they are great men, and pass for wise men, and must not now be contradicted or controlled. 2. The particular charge exhibited against them in proof of this character. They are indicted

for words spoken at their council-board, which he that *stands in the congregation of the mighty* would take cognizance of (v. 3); they said to this effect, "*It is not near*; the destruction of our city, that has been so often threatened by the prophets, *is not near*, not so near as they talk of." They are conscious to themselves of such an enmity to reformation that they cannot but conclude it will come at last; but they have such an opinion of God's patience (though they have long abused it) that they are willing to hope it will not come this great while. Note, Where Satan cannot persuade men to look upon the judgment to come as a thing doubtful and uncertain, yet he gains his point by persuading them to look upon it as a thing at a distance, so that it loses its force: if it be sure, *yet it is not near*; whereas, in truth, *the Judge stands before the door*. Now, if the destruction is not near, they conclude, *Let us build houses*; let us count upon a continuance, for *this city is the caldron and we are the flesh*. This seems to be a proverbial expression, signifying no more than this, "We are as safe in this city as flesh in a boiling pot; the walls of the city shall be to us as *walls of brass*, and shall receive no more damage from the besiegers about it than the *caldron* does from the fire under it. Those that think to force us out of our city into captivity shall find it to be as much at their peril as it would be to take the flesh out of a boiling pot with their hands." This appears to be the meaning of it, by the answer God gives to it (v. 9): "*I will bring you out of the midst of the city*, where you think yourselves safe, and then it will appear (v. 11) that *this is not your caldron, neither are you the flesh*." Perhaps it has a particular reference to the *flesh of the peace-offerings*, which it was so great an offence for the priests themselves to take out of the caldron while it was in seething (as we find 1 Sam. ii. 13, 14), and then it intimates that they were the more secure because Jerusalem was the holy city, and they thought themselves a holy people in it, not to be meddled with. Some think this was a banter upon Jeremiah, who in one of his first visions saw Jerusalem represented by a *seething pot*, Jer. i. 13. "Now," say they, in a way of jest and ridicule, "if it be a seething pot, we are as the flesh in it, and who dares meddle with us?" Thus they continued mocking the messengers of the Lord, even while they suffered for so doing; but *be you not mockers, lest your hands be made strong*. Those hearts are hard indeed which are made more secure by those words of God which were designed for warning to them.

II. The method taken to awaken them out of their security. One would think that the providences of God which related to them were enough to startle them; but, to help them to understand and improve those,

the word of God is sent to them to give them warning (v. 4): *Therefore prophesy against them*, and *try to undeceive them; prophesy, O son of man!* upon these dead and dry bones. Note, The greatest kindness ministers can do to secure sinners is to preach against them, and to show them their misery and danger, though they are ever so unwilling to see them. We then act most for them when we appear most against them. But the prophet, being at a loss what to say to men that were hardened in sin, and that bade defiance to the judgments of God, *the Spirit of the Lord fell upon him*, to make him full of power and courage, and *said unto him, Speak*. Note, When sinners are flattering themselves into their own ruin it is time to speak, and to tell them that they shall have no peace if they go on. Ministers are sometimes so bashful and timorous, and so much at a loss, that they must be put on to speak, and to speak boldly. But he that commands the prophet to speak gives him instructions what to say; and he must address himself to them as *the house of Israel* (v. 5), for not the princes only, but all the people, were concerned to know the truth of their cause, to know the worst of it. They are the *house of Israel*, and therefore the *God of Israel* is concerned, in kindness to them, to give them warning; and they are concerned in duty to him to take the warning. And what is it that he must say to them in God's name? 1. Let them know that the God of heaven takes notice of the vain confidences with which they support themselves (v. 5): "*I know the things which come into your minds every one of them, what secret reasons you have for these resolutions, and what you aim at in putting so good a face upon a matter you know to be bad.*" Note, God perfectly knows not only the things that come out of our mouths, but the things that come into our minds, not only all we say, but all we think; even those thoughts that are most suddenly darted into our minds, and that as suddenly slip out of them again, so that we ourselves are scarcely aware of them, yet God knows them. He knows us better than we know ourselves; *he understands our thoughts afar off*. The consideration of this should oblige us to keep our hearts with all diligence, that no vain thoughts come into them or lodge within them. 2. Let them know that those who advised the people to stand it out should be accounted before God the murderers of all who had fallen, or should yet fall, in Jerusalem, by the sword of the Chaldeans; and those slain were the only ones that should remain in the city, as the *flesh in the caldron*. "*You have multiplied your slain in the city, not only those whom you have by the sword of justice unjustly put to death under colour of law, but those whom you have by your wilfulness and pride unwisely exposed to the sword of war,*

though you were told by the prophets that you should certainly go by the worst. Thus you, with your stubborn humour, have filled the streets of Jerusalem with the slain," v. 6. Note, Those who are either unrighteous or imprudent in beginning or carrying on a war bring upon themselves a great deal of the guilt of blood; and those who are slain in the battles or sieges which they, by such a reasonable peace as the war aimed at, might have prevented, will be called *their slain*. Now these slain are the only flesh that shall be left in this *caldron*, v. 7. There shall none remain to keep possession of the city but those that are buried in it. There shall be no inhabitants of Jerusalem but the inhabitants of the graves there, no freemen of the city but the free among the dead. 3. Let them know that, how impregnable soever they thought their city to be, they should be forced out of it, either driven to flight or dragged into captivity: *I will bring you forth out of the midst of it*, whether you will or no, v. 7, 9. They had provoked God to forsake the city, and thought they should do well enough by their own policy and strength when he was gone; but God will make them know that there is no peace to those that have left their God. If they have by their sins driven God from his house, he will soon by his judgments drive them from theirs; and it will be found that those are least safe that are most secure: "*This city shall not be your caldron, neither shall you be the flesh; you shall not soak away in it as you promise yourselves, and die in your nest; you think yourself safe in the midst thereof, but you shall not be long there.*" 4. Let them know that when God has got them out of the midst of Jerusalem he will pursue them with his judgments wherever he finds them, the judgments which they thought to shelter themselves from by keeping close in Jerusalem. They feared the sword if they should go out to the Chaldeans, and therefore would abide in their *caldron*, but, says God, *I will bring a sword upon you* (v. 8) and *you shall fall by the sword*, v. 10. Note, The fear of the wicked shall come upon him. And there is no fence against the judgments of God when they come with commission, no, not in walls of brass. They were afraid of trusting to the mercy of strangers. "But," says God, "*I will deliver you into the hands of strangers, whose resentments you shall feel, since you were not willing to lie at their mercy.*" See Jer. xxxviii. 17, 18. They thought to escape the judgments of God, but God says that he will *execute judgments upon them*; and whereas they resolved, if they must be judged, that it should be in Jerusalem, God tells them (v. 10 and again v. 11) that he will judge them *in the borders of Israel*, which was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar slew all the nobles of Judah at Riblah in the land of Hamath, on the utmost border of the land



of Canaan. Note, Those who have taken ever so deep root in the place where they live cannot be sure that in that place they shall die. 5. Let them know that all this is the due punishment of their sin, and *the revelation of the righteous judgment of God against them: You shall know that I am the Lord*, v. 10 and again v. 12. Those shall be made to know by the sword of the Lord who would not be taught by his word what a hatred he has to sin, and what a fearful thing it is for impenitent sinners to fall into his hands. *I will execute judgments*, and then you shall know that *I am the Lord*, for the Lord is known by the judgments which he executes upon those that have not walked in his statutes. Hereby it is known that he made the law, because he punishes the breach of it. *I will execute judgments among you* (says God) because *you have not executed my judgments*, v. 12. Note, The executing of the judgments of God's mouth by us, in a uniform steady course of obedience to his law, is the only way to prevent the executing of the judgments of his hand upon us in our ruin and confusion. One way or other, God's judgments will be executed; the law will take place either in its precept or in its penalty. If we do not give honour to God by executing his judgments as he has commanded, he will get him honour upon us by executing his judgments as he has threatened; and thus we shall know that he is the Lord, the sovereign Lord of all, that will not be mocked. And observe, When they cast off God's statutes, and walked not in them, they did *after the manners of the heathen that were round about them*, and introduced into their worship all their impure, ridiculous, and barbarous usages. When men leave the settled rule of divine institutions, they wander endlessly. Justly therefore was this made the reason why they should keep God's ordinances, that they might not commit the abominable customs of the heathen, Lev. xviii. 30.

III. This awakening word is here immediately followed by an awakening providence, v. 13. Here we may observe, 1. With what power Ezekiel prophesied, or, rather, what a divine power went along with it: *It came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died*; he was mentioned (v. 1) as a principal man among the twenty-five princes that made all the mischief in Jerusalem. It should seem, this was done in vision now, as the slaying of the ancient men (*ch. ix. 6*) upon occasion of which Ezekiel prayed (v. 8) as he did here; but it was an assurance that when this prophecy should be published it should be done in fact. The death of Pelatiah was an earnest of the complete accomplishment of this prophecy. Note, God is pleased oftentimes to single out some sinners, and to make them monuments of his justice, for warning to others of what is coming; and

some that thought themselves very safe are snatched away suddenly, and drop down dead in an instant, as Ananias and Sapphira at Peter's feet when he prophesied. 2. With what pity Ezekiel prayed. Though the sudden death of Pelatiah was a confirmation of Ezekiel's prophecy, and really an honour to him, yet he was in deep concern about it, and laid it to heart as if he had been his relation or friend: *He fell on his face and cried with a loud voice*, as one in earnest, "Ah! Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" Many are swept away by the judgments we have been under; and shall the remnant which have escaped the sword die thus by the immediate hand of heaven? Then thou wilt indeed make a full end." Perhaps it was Ezekiel's infirmity to beavil the death of this wicked prince thus, as it was Samuel's to mourn so long for Saul; but thus he showed how far he was from desiring the woe of the day he foretold. David lamented the sickness of those that hated and persecuted him. And we ought to be much affected with the sudden death of others, yea, though they are wicked.

14 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 15 Son of man, thy brethren, *even* thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, *are* they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the LORD: unto us is this land given in possession. 16 Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. 17 Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. 18 And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. 19 And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: 20 That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be

their God. 21 But *as for them* whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord God.

Prophecy was designed to exalt *every valley* as well as to bring low *every mountain and hill* (Isa. xl. 4), and prophets were to speak not only conviction to the presumptuous and secure, but comfort to the despised and desponding that trembled at God's word. The prophet Ezekiel, having in the former part of this chapter received instructions for the awakening of those that were *at ease in Zion*, is in these verses furnished with comfortable words for those that mourned in Babylon and *by the rivers* there sat *weeping* when they remembered Zion. Observe,

I. How the pious captives were trampled upon and insulted over by those who continued in Jerusalem, v. 15. God tells the prophet what the inhabitants of Jerusalem said of him and the rest of them that were already carried away to Babylon. God had owned them as *good figs*, and declared it was for their good that he had sent them into Babylon; but the inhabitants of Jerusalem abandoned them, supposing those that were really the best saints to be the greatest sinners of all men that dwelt in Jerusalem. Observe, 1. How they are described: They are *thy brethren* (says God to the prophet), whom thou hast a concern and affection for; they are *the men of thy kindred* (*the men of thy redemption*, so the word is), the next of kin, to whom the right of redeeming the alienated possession belongs, but who are so far from being able to do it that they have themselves gone into captivity. They are *the whole house of Israel*; God so accounts of them because they only have retained their integrity, and are bettered by their captivity. They were not only of the same family and nation with Ezekiel, but of the same spirit; they were his hearers, and he had communion with them in holy ordinances; and perhaps upon that account they are called *his brethren and the men of his kindred*. 2. How they were disowned by *the inhabitants of Jerusalem*; they said of them, *Get you far from the Lord*. Those that were at ease and proud themselves scorned their brethren that were humbled and under humbling providences. (1.) They cut them off from being members of their church. Because they had separated themselves from their rulers, and in compliance with the will of God had surrendered themselves to the king of Babylon, they excommunicated them, and said, "*Get you far from the Lord*; we will have nothing to do with you." Those that were superstitious were very willing to shake off those that were conscientious, and were severe in their censures of them and sentences against

them, as if they were forsaken and forgotten of the Lord and were cut off from the communion of the faithful. (2.) They cut them off from being members of the commonwealth too, as if they had no longer any part or lot in the matter: "*Unto us is this land given in possession*, and you have forfeited your estates by surrendering to the king of Babylon, and we have thereby become entitled to them." God takes notice of, and is much displeased with, the contempt which those that are in prosperity put upon their brethren that are in affliction.

II. The gracious promises which God made to them in consideration of the insolent conduct of their brethren towards them. Those that hated them and cast them out said, *Let the Lord be glorified*; but *he shall appear to their joy*, Isa. lxvi. 5. God owns that his hand had gone out against them, which had given occasion to their brethren to triumph over them (v. 16): "*It is true I have cast them far off among the heathen and scattered them among the countries*; they look as if they were an abandoned people, and so mingled with the nations that they will be lost among them; but I have mercy in store for them." Note, God takes occasion from the contempts which are put upon his people to speak comfort to them, as David hoped God would reward him good for Shimei's cursing. His time to support his people's hopes is when their enemies are endeavouring to drive them to despair. Now God promises,

1. That he will make up to them the want of the temple and the privileges of it (v. 16): *I will be to them as a little sanctuary, in the countries where they shall come*. Those at Jerusalem have the temple, but without God; those in Babylon have God, though without the temple. (1.) God *will be a sanctuary to them*; that is, a place of refuge; to him they shall flee, and in him they shall be safe, as he was that took hold on the *horns of the altar*. Or, rather, they shall have such communion with God in the land of their captivity as it was thought could be had nowhere but in the temple. They shall there *see God's power and his glory*, as they used to *see them in the sanctuary*; they shall have the tokens of God's presence with them, and his grace in their hearts shall sanctify their prayers and praises, as well as ever the altar sanctified the gift, so that they shall *please the Lord better than an ox or bullock*. (2.) He *will be a little sanctuary*, not seen or observed by their enemies, who looked with an evil and an envious eye upon *that house at Jerusalem* which was high and great, 1 Kings ix. 8. They were but few and mean, and a little sanctuary was fittest for them. God regards the low estate of his people, and suits his favours to their circumstances. Observe the condescensions of divine grace. The great God will be to his people a little sanctuary. Note, Those that are deprived of



the benefit of public ordinances, if it be not their own fault, may have the want of them abundantly made up in the immediate communications of divine grace and comforts.

2. That God would in due time put an end to their afflictions, bring them out of the land of their captivity, and settle them again, them or their children, in their own land (v. 17): "*I will gather even you that are thus dispersed, thus despised, and given over for lost by your own countrymen; I will gather you from the people, distinguish you from those with whom you are mingled, deliver you from those by whom you are held captives, and assemble you in a body out of the countries where you have been scattered; you shall not come back one by one, but all together, which will make your return more honourable, safe, and comfortable; and then I will give you the land of Israel, which now your brethren look upon you as forever shut out from.*" Note, It is well for us that men's severe censures cannot cut us off from God's gracious promises. There are many that will be found to have a place in the holy land whom uncharitable men, by their monopolies of it to themselves, had secluded from it. *I will give you the land of Israel, give it to you again by a new grant, and they shall come thither.* If there be any thing in the change of the person from you to them, it may signify the posterity of those to whom the promise is made. "*You shall have the title as the patriarchs had, and those that come after shall have the possession.*"

3. That God by his grace would part between them and their sins, v. 18. Their captivity shall effectually cure them of their idolatry: *When they come thither to their own land again they shall take away all the detestable things thereof.* Their idols, that had been their delectable things, should now be looked upon with detestation, not only the idols of Babylon, where they were captives, but the idols of Canaan, where they were natives; they should not only not worship them as they had done, but they should not suffer any monuments of them to remain: *They shall take all the abominations thereof thence.* Note, Then it is in mercy that we return to a prosperous estate, when we return not to the sins and follies of that state. *What have I to do any more with idols?*

4. That God would powerfully dispose them to their duty; they shall not only *cease to do evil*, but they shall *learn to do well*, because there shall be not only an end of their troubles, but a return to their peace.

(1.) God will plant good principles in them; he will make the tree good, v. 19. This is a gospel promise, and is made good to all those whom God designs for the heavenly Canaan; for God prepares all for heaven whom he has prepared heaven for. It is promised, [1.] That God will give them

*one heart*, a heart entire for the true God and not divided as it had been among many gods, a heart firmly fixed and resolved for God and not wavering, steady and uniform, and not inconstant with itself. *One heart* is a sincere and upright heart, its intentions of a piece with its professions. [2.] That he will put a new spirit within them, a temper of mind agreeable to the new circumstances into which God in his providence would bring them. All that are sanctified have a new spirit, quite different from what it was; they act from new principles, walk by new rules, and aim at new ends. A new name, or a new face, will not serve without a new spirit. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* [3.] That he will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, out of their corrupt nature. Their hearts shall no longer be, as they have been, dead and dry, and hard and heavy, as a stone, no longer incapable of bearing good fruit, so that the good seed is lost upon it, as it was on the stony ground. [4.] That he will give them a heart of flesh, not dead or proud flesh, but living flesh; he will make their hearts sensible of spiritual pains and spiritual pleasures, will make them tender, and apt to receive impressions. This is God's work, it is his gift, his gift by promise; and a wonderful and happy change it is that is wrought by it, from death to life. This is promised to those whom God would bring back to their own land; for then such a change of the condition is for the better indeed when it is accompanied with such a change of the heart; and such a change must be wrought in all those that shall be brought to the better country, that is, the heavenly.

(2.) Their practices shall be consonant to those principles: *I will give them a new spirit*, not that they may be able to discourse well of religion and to dispute for it, but that *they may walk in my statutes* in their whole conversation and keep my ordinances in all acts of religious worship, v. 20. These two must go together; and those to whom God has given a new heart and a new spirit will make conscience of both; and then *they shall be my people and I will be their God.* The ancient covenant, which seemed to be broken and forgotten, shall be renewed. By their idolatry, it should seem, they had cast God off; by their captivity, it should seem, God had cast them off. But when they were cured of their idolatry, and delivered out of their captivity, God and his Israel own one another again. God, by his good work in them, will make them his people; and then, by the tokens of his good-will towards them, he will show that he is their God.

III. Here is a threatening of wrath against those who hated to be reformed. As, when judgments are threatened, the righteous are distinguished so as not to share in the evil of those judgments, so, when favours are promised, the wicked are distinguished so



as not to share in the comfort of those favours; they have no part nor lot in the matter, v. 21. *But, as for those that have no grace, what have they to do with peace?* Observe, 1. Their description. Their *heart walks after the heart of their detestable things*; they have as great a mind to worship devils as devils have to be worshipped. Or, in opposition to the *new heart* which God gives his people, which is a heart after his own heart, they have a *heart after the heart of their idols*; in their temper and practice they conformed to the characters and accounts given them of their idols, and the ideas they had of them, and of them they learned lewdness and cruelty. Here lies the root of all their wickedness, the corruption of the heart; as the root of their reformation is laid in the renovation of the heart. The heart has its walks, and according as those are the man is. 2. Their doom. It carries both justice and terror in it: *I will recompense their way upon their own heads*; I will deal with them as they deserve. There needs no more than this to speak God righteous, that he does but render to men according to their deserts: and yet such are the deserts of sin that there needs no more than this to speak the sinner miserable.

22 Then did the cherubims lift up their wings, and the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. 23 And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city. 24 Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. 25 Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that the LORD had showed me.

Here is, 1. The departure of God's presence from the city and temple. When the message was committed to the prophet, and he was fully apprized of it, fully instructed how to separate between the *precious and the vile*, then the cherubim *lifted up their wings and the wheels beside them* (v. 22) as before, ch. x. 19. Angels, when they have done their errands in this lower world, are upon the wing to be gone, for they lose no time. We left the *glory of the LORD* last at the *east gate of the temple* (ch. x. 19), which is here said to be in the *midst of the city*. Now here we are told that, finding and wondering that there was none to intercede, none to uphold, none to invite its return, it removed next to the *mountain which is on the east side of the city* (v. 23); that was the *mount of Olives*. On this mountain they had set up

their idols, to confront God in his temple, when he dwelt there (1 Kings xi. 7), and thence it was called the *mount of corruption* (2 Kings xxiii. 13); therefore there God does as it were set up his standard, his tribunal, as it were to confront those who thought to keep possession of the temple for themselves now that God had left it. From that mountain there was a full prospect of the city; thither God removed, to make good what he had said (Deut. xxxii. 20), *I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be*. It was from this mountain that Christ beheld the city and wept over it, in the foresight of its last destruction by the Romans. The *glory of the LORD* removed thither, to be as it were yet within call, and ready to return if now at length, *in this their day*, they would have understood the things that belonged to their peace. Loth to depart bids off farewell. God, by going away thus slowly, thus gradually, intimated that he left them with reluctance, and would not have gone if they had not perfectly forced him from them. He did now, in effect, say, *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?* But, though he bear long, he will not bear always, but will at length forsake those, and cast them off for ever, who have forsaken him and cast him off. 2. The departure of this vision from the prophet. At length it *went up from him* (v. 24); he saw it mount upwards, till it went out of sight, which would be a confirmation to his faith that it was a heavenly vision, that it descended from above, for thitherward it returned. Note, The visions which the saints have of the glory of God will not be constant till they come to heaven. They have glimpses of that glory, which they soon lose again, visions which go up from them, tastes of divine pleasures, but not a continual feast. It was from the mount of Olives that the vision went up, typifying the ascension of Christ to heaven from that very mountain, when those that had seen him *manifested in the flesh* saw him no more. It was foretold (Zech. xiv. 4) that *his feet should stand upon the mount of Olives*, stand last there. 3. The prophet's return to those of the captivity. The same spirit that had carried him in a trance or ecstasy to Jerusalem brought him back to Chaldea; for there the bounds of his habitation are at present appointed, and that is the place of his service. The Spirit came to him, not to deliver him out of captivity, but (which was equivalent) to support and comfort him in his captivity. 4. The account which he gave to his hearers of all he had seen and heard, v. 25. He received that he might give, and he was *faithful to him that appointed him*; he delivered his message very honestly: he *spoke all that*, and that only, which God *had shown* him. He told them of the great wickedness he had seen at Jerusalem, and the ruin that was hastening towards that city, that they might



not repent of their surrendering themselves to the king of Babylon as Jeremiah advised them, and blame themselves for it, nor envy those that staid behind, and laughed at them for going when they did, nor wish themselves there again, but be content in their captivity. Who would covet to be in a city so full of sin and so near to ruin? It is better to be in Babylon under the favour of God than in Jerusalem under his wrath and curse. But, though this was delivered immediately to those of the captivity, yet we may suppose that they sent the contents of it to those at Jerusalem, with whom they kept up a correspondence; and well would it have been for Jerusalem if she had taken the warning hereby given.

## CHAP. XII.

Though the vision of God's glory had gone up from the prophet, yet his word comes to him still, and is by him sent to the people, and to the same purport with that which was discovered to him in the vision, namely, to set forth the terrible judgments that were coming upon Jerusalem, by which the city and temple should be entirely laid waste. In this chapter, I. The prophet, by removing his stuff, and quitting his lodgings, must be a sign to set forth Zedekiah's flight out of Jerusalem in the utmost confusion when the Chaldeans took the city, ver. 1-16. II. The prophet, by eating his meat with trembling, must be a sign to set forth the famine in the city during the siege, and the consternation that the inhabitants should be in, ver. 17-20. III. A message is sent from God to the people, to assure them that all these predictions should have their accomplishment very shortly, and not be deferred, as they flattered themselves they would be, ver. 21-28.

THE word of the LORD also came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house. 3 Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house. 4 Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. 5 Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. 6 In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel. 7 And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it

upon my shoulder in their sight. 8 And in the morning came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, 9 Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou? 10 Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them. 11 Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. 12 And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. 13 My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there. 14 And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them. 15 And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. 16 But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Perhaps Ezekiel reflected with so much pleasure upon the vision he had had of the glory of God that often, since it went up from him, he was wishing it might come down to him again, and, having seen it once and a second time, he was willing to hope he might be a third time so favoured; but we do not find that he ever saw it any more, and yet the word of the Lord comes to him; for God did in divers manners speak to the fathers (Heb. i. 1) and they often heard the words of God when they did not see the visions of the Almighty. Faith comes by hearing that word of prophecy which is more sure than vision. We may keep up our communion with God without raptures and ecstasies. In these verses the prophet is directed,

I. By what signs and actions to express the approaching captivity of Zedekiah king

of Judah; that was the thing to be foretold, and it is foretold to those that are already in captivity, because as long as Zedekiah was upon the throne they flattered themselves with hopes that he would make his part good with the king of Babylon, whose yoke he was now projecting to shake off, from which, it is probable, these poor captives promised themselves great things; and it may be, when he was forming that design, he privately sent encouragement to them to hope that he would rescue them shortly, or procure their liberty by exchange of prisoners. While they were fed with these vain hopes they could not set themselves either to submit to their affliction or to get good by their affliction. It was therefore necessary, but very difficult, to convince them that Zedekiah, instead of being their deliverer, should very shortly be their fellow-sufferer. Now, one would think it might have been sufficient if the prophet had only told them this in God's name, as he does afterwards (v. 10); but, to prepare them for the prophecy of it, he must first give them a sign of it, must speak it to their eyes first and then to their ears: and here we have, 1. The reason why he must take this method (v. 2): It is because they are a stupid, dull, unthinking people, that will not heed or will soon forget what they only hear of, or at least will not be at all affected with it; it will make no impression at all upon them: *Thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house*, whom it is next to impossible to work any good upon. *They have eyes and ears*, they have intellectual powers and faculties, but they *see not*, they *hear not*. They were idolaters, whose character it was that they were like the idols they worshipped, which *have eyes and see not*, *ears and hear not*, Ps. cxv. 5, 6, 8. Note, Those are to be reckoned rebellious that shut their eyes against the divine light and stop their ears to the divine law. The ignorance of those that are wilfully ignorant, that have faculties and means and will not use them, is so far from being their excuse that it adds rebellion to their sin. None so blind, so deaf, as those that will not see, that will not hear. *They see not, they hear not; for they are a rebellious house*. The cause is all from themselves: the darkness of the understanding is owing to the stubbornness of the will. Now this is the reason why he must speak to them by signs, as deaf people are taught, that they might be either instructed or ashamed. Note, Ministers must accommodate themselves not only to the weakness, but to the wilfulness of those they deal with, and deal with them accordingly: if they dwell among those that are rebellious they must speak to them the more plainly and pressingly, and take that course that is most likely to work upon them, that they may be left inexcusable. 2. The method he must take to awaken and affect them; he must furnish himself with all necessities for re-

moving (v. 3), provide for a journey clothes and money; he must *remove from one place to another*, as one unsettled and forced to shift; this he must do *by day*, in the sight of the people; he must bring out all his household goods, to be packed up and sent away (v. 4); and, because all the doors and gates were either locked up that they could not pass through them or so guarded by the enemy that they durst not, he must therefore *dig through the wall*, and convey his goods away clandestinely through that breach in the wall, v. 5. He must carry his goods away himself upon his own shoulders, for want of a servant to attend him; he must do this *in the twilight*, that he might not be discovered; and, when he has made what shift he can to secure some of the best of his effects, he must himself steal away *at evening in their sight*, with fear and trembling, and must go *as those that go forth into captivity* (v. 4); that is, he must cover his face (v. 6) as being ashamed to be seen and afraid to be known, or in token of very great sorrow and concern; he must go away as a poor broken tradesman, who, when he is forced to shut up shop, hides his head, or quits his country. Thus Ezekiel must be himself a sign to them; and when perhaps he seemed somewhat backward to put himself to all this trouble, and to expose himself to be bantered and ridiculed for it, to reconcile him to it God says (v. 3) "*It may be they will consider*, and will by it be taken off from their vain confidences, *though they be a rebellious house*." Note, We must not despair even of the worst, but that yet they may be brought to bethink themselves and repent; and therefore we must continue the use of proper means for their conviction and conversion, because, while there is life, there is hope. And ministers must be willing to go through the most difficult and inconvenient offices (for such was this of Ezekiel's removing), though there be but the *it may be* of success. If but one soul be awakened to consider, our care and pains will be well bestowed. 3. Ezekiel's ready and punctual obedience to the orders God gave him (v. 7): *I did so as I was commanded*. Hereby he teaches us all, and ministers especially, (1.) To obey with cheerfulness every command of God, even the most difficult. Christ himself *learned obedience*, and so we must all. (2.) To do all we can for the good of the souls of others, to put ourselves to any trouble or pains for the conviction of those that are unconvinced. *We do all things* (that is, we are willing to do any thing), *dearly beloved, for your edifying*. (3.) To be ourselves affected with those things wherewith we desire to affect others. When Ezekiel would give his hearers a melancholy prospect he does himself put on a melancholy aspect. (4.) To sit loose to this world, and prepare to leave it, to carry out our *stuff* for removing, because *we have here no continuing city*. *Arise, depart, this is not*



*your rest, for it is polluted.* Thou dwellest in a rebellious house, therefore prepare for removing: for who would not be willing to leave such a house, such a wicked world as this is?

II. He is directed by what words to explain those signs and actions, as Agabus, when he bound his own hands and feet, told whose binding was thereby signified. But observe, It was not till morning that God gave him an exposition of the sign, till the next morning, to keep up in him a continual dependence upon God for instruction. As what God does, so what he directs us to do, perhaps we know not now, but shall know hereafter.

1. It was supposed that the people would ask the meaning of this sign, or at least they should (v. 9): "*Hath not the house of Israel said unto thee, What doest thou?*" Yes, I know they have. *Though they are a rebellious house*, yet they are inquisitive concerning the mind of God," as those (Isa. lviii. 2) who *sought God daily*. Therefore the prophet must do such a strange uncouth thing, that they might enquire what it meant; and then, it may be hoped, people will take notice of what is told them, and profit by it, when it comes to them in answer to their enquiries. But some understand it as an intimation that they had not made any such enquiries: "*Hath not this rebellious house so much as asked thee, What doest thou?*" No; they take no notice of it; but tell them the meaning of it, though they do not ask." Note, When God sends to us by his ministers he observes what entertainment we give to the messages he sends us; he hearkens and hears what we say to them, and what enquiries we make upon them, and is much displeased if we pass them by without taking any notice of them. When we have heard the word we should apply to our ministers for further instruction; and then we shall know if we thus follow on to know.

2. The prophet is to tell them the meaning of it. In general (v. 10), *This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem*; they knew who that was, and gloried in it now that they were in captivity that they had a prince of their own in Jerusalem, and that *the house of Israel* was yet entire there, and therefore doubted not but in time to do well enough. "But tell them," says God, "that in what thou hast done they may read the doom of their friends at Jerusalem. *Say, I am your sign,*" v. 11. As the conversation of ministers should teach the people what they should do, so the providences of God concerning them are sometimes intended to tell them what they must expect. The unsettled state and removals of ministers give warning to people what they must expect in this world, no continuance, but constant changes. When times of trouble are coming on Christ tells his disciples, *They shall first lay their hands on you*, Luke xxi. 12.

(1.) The people shall be led away into captivity (v. 11): *As I have done, so shall it be done unto them*; they shall be forced away from their own houses, no more to return to them, neither shall *their place know them any more*. We cannot say concerning our dwelling-place that it is our resting-place; for how far we may be tossed from it before we die we cannot foresee. (2.) The prince shall in vain attempt to make his escape; for he also shall go into captivity. Jeremiah had told Zedekiah the same to his face (Jer. xxxiv. 3): *Thou shalt not escape, but shalt surely be taken*. Ezekiel here foretells it to those who made him their confidence and promised themselves relief from him. [1.] That he shall himself carry away his own goods: *He shall bear upon his shoulder some of his most valuable effects*. Note, The judgments of God can turn a prince into a porter. He that was wont to have the regalia carried before him, and to march through the city at noon-day, shall now himself carry his goods on his back and steal away out of the city in the twilight. See what a change sin makes with men! All the avenues to the palace being carefully watched by the enemy, *they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby*. Men shall be their own house-breakers, and steal away their own goods; so it is when the sword of war has cancelled all right and property. [2.] That he shall attempt to escape in a disguise, with a mask or a visor on, which *shall cover his face*, so that he shall be able only to look before him, and shall *not see the ground with his eyes*. He who, when he was in pomp, affected to be seen, now that he is in his flight is afraid to be seen; let none therefore either be proud of being looked at or over-much pleased with looking about them, when they see a king with *his face covered, that he cannot see the ground*. [3.] That he shall be made a prisoner and carried captive into Babylon (v. 13): *My net will I spread upon him and he shall be taken in my snare*. It seemed to be the Chaldeans' net and their snare, but God owns them for his. Those that think to escape the sword of the Lord will find themselves taken in his net. Jeremiah had said that king Zedekiah should *see the king of Babylon* and that he should *go to Babylon*; Ezekiel says, He shall be brought to Babylon, yet he shall *not see it*, though *he shall die there*. Those that were disposed to cavil would perhaps object that these two prophets contradicted one another; for one said, He shall *see the king of Babylon*, the other said, He shall *not see Babylon*; and yet both proved true: he did *see the king of Babylon* at Riblah, where he passed sentence upon him for his rebellion, but there he had his eyes put out, so that he did *not see Babylon* when he was brought thither. These captives expected to see their prince come to Babylon as a conqueror, to bring them out of their trouble: but he



shall come thither a prisoner, and his disgrace will be a great addition to their troubles. Little joy could they have in seeing him when he could not see them. [4.] That all his guards should be dispersed and utterly disabled for doing him any service (v. 14): *I will scatter all that are about him to help him*, so that he shall be left helpless; *I will scatter them among the nations and disperse them in the countries* (v. 15), to be monuments of divine justice wherever they go. But are there not hopes that they may rally again? (he that flies one time may fight another time); no: *I will draw out the sword after them*, which shall cut them off wherever it finds them; for the sword that God draws out will be sure to do the execution designed. Yet of Zedekiah's scattered troops some shall escape (v. 16): *I will leave a few men of them*. Though they shall all be scattered, yet they shall not all be cut off; some shall have their *lives given them for a prey*. And the end for which they are thus remarkably spared is very observable: *That they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come*; the troubles they are brought into will bring them to themselves and to their right mind, and then they will acknowledge the justice of God in all that is brought upon them and will make an ingenuous confession of their sins, which provoked God thus to contend with them; and, as by this it shall appear that they were spared in mercy, so hereby they will make a suitable grateful return to God for his favours to them in sparing them. Note, When God has remarkably delivered us from the deaths wherewith we were surrounded we must look upon it that for this end, among others, we were spared, that we might glorify God and edify others by making a penitent acknowledgment of our sins. Those that by their afflictions are brought to this are then made to know that *God is the Lord* and may help to bring others to the knowledge of him. See how God brings good out of evil. The dispersion of sinners, who had done God much dishonour and disservice in their own country, proves the dispersion of penitents, who shall do him much honour and service in other countries. The Levites are by a curse *divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel*, yet it is turned into a blessing, for thereby they have the fairest opportunity to *teach Jacob God's laws*.

17 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 18 Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; 19 And say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *and of the land of Israel*; They shall eat their bread

with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. 20 And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that *I am the LORD*.

Here again the prophet is made a sign to them of the desolations that were coming on Judah and Jerusalem. 1. He must himself eat and drink in care and fear, especially when he was in company, v. 17, 18. Though he was under no apprehension of danger to himself, but lived in safety and plenty, yet he must *eat his bread with quaking* (the bread of sorrows, Ps. cxxvii. 2) and *drink his water with trembling and with carefulness*, that he might express the calamitous condition of those that should be in Jerusalem during the siege; not that he must dissemble and pretend to be in fear and care when really he was not; but having to foretell this judgment, to show that he firmly believed it himself, and yet was far from desiring it, in the prospect of it he was himself affected with grief and fear. Note, When ministers speak of the ruin coming upon impenitent sinners they must endeavour to speak feelingly, as those that *know the terrors of the Lord*; and they must be content to endure hardness, so that they may but do good. 2. He must tell them that *the inhabitants of Jerusalem* should in like manner eat and drink with care and fear, v. 19, 20. Both those that have their home in Jerusalem and those *of the land of Israel* that come to shelter themselves there, *shall eat their bread with carefulness and drink their water with astonishment*, either because they are afraid it will not hold out, but they shall want shortly, or because they are continually expecting the alarms of the enemy, *their life hanging in doubt before them* (Deut. xxviii. 66), so that what they have they shall have no enjoyment of nor will it do them any good. Note, Care and fear, if they prevail, are enough to embitter all our comforts and are themselves very sore judgments. They shall be reduced to these straits that thus by degrees, and by the hand of those that thus straiten them, both city and country may be laid in ruins; for it is no less than an utter destruction of both that is aimed at in these judgments—that *her land may be desolate from all the fulness thereof*, may be stripped of all its ornaments and robbed of all its fruits, and then of course *the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste*, for they are *served by the field*. This universal desolation was coming upon them, and then no wonder that they eat their bread with care and fear. Now we are here told, (1.) How bad the cause



of this judgment was; it is *because of the violence of all those that dwell therein*, their injustice and oppression, and the mischief they did one another, for which God would reckon with them, as well as for the affronts put upon him in his worship. Note, The decay of virtue in a nation brings on a decay of every thing else; and when neighbours devour one another it is just with God to bring enemies upon them to devour them all. (2.) How good the effect of this judgment should be: *You shall know that I am the Lord*; and if, by these judgments, they learn to know him aright, that will make up the loss of all they are deprived of by these desolations. Those are happy afflictions, how grievous soever to flesh and blood, that help to introduce us into and improve us in an acquaintance with God.

21 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 22 Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? 23 Tell them, therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. 24 For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God. 26 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 27 Son of man, behold, *they of the house of Israel say*, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. 28 Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God.

Various methods had been used to awaken this secure and careless people to an expectation of the judgments coming, that they might be stirred up, by repentance and reformation, to prevent them. The prophecies of their ruin were confirmed by visions, and illustrated by signs, and all with such evidence and power that one would think they must needs be wrought upon; but here we

are told how they evaded the conviction, and guarded against it, namely, by telling themselves, and one another, that though these judgments threatened should come at last yet they would not come of a long time. This suggestion, with which they bolstered themselves up in their security, is here answered, and shown to be vain and groundless, in two separate messages which God sent to them by the prophet at different times, both to the same purport; such care, such pains, must the prophet take to undeceive them, v. 21, 26. Observe,

I. How they flattered themselves with hopes that the judgments should be delayed. One saying they had, which had become proverbial in the land of Israel, v. 22. They said, "*The days are prolonged*;" the judgments have not come when they were expected to come, but seem to be still put off *de die in diem*—from day to day, and therefore we may conclude that *every vision fails*, because it should seem that some do, that because the destruction has not come yet it will never come; we will never trust a prophet again, for we have been more frightened than hurt." And another saying they had which, if it would not conquer their convictions, yet would cool their affections and abate their concern, and that was, "*The vision is for a great while to come*;" it refers to events at a vast distance, and he prophesies of things which, though they may be true, are yet very far off, so that we need not trouble our heads about them (v. 27); we may die in honour and peace before these troubles come." And, if indeed the troubles had been thus adjourned, they might have made themselves easy, as Hezekiah did. *Is it not well if peace and truth shall be in my days?* But it was a great mistake, and they did but deceive themselves into their own ruin; and God is here much displeased at it; for, 1. It was a wretched abuse of the patience of God, who, because for a time he kept silence, was thought to be *altogether such a one as themselves*, Ps. 1. 21. That forbearance of God which should have led them to repentance hardened them in sin. They were willing to think their works were not evil because sentence against them was not executed speedily; and therefore concluded the vision itself failed, because the days were prolonged. 2. It received countenance from the false prophets that were among them, as should seem from the notice God takes (v. 24) of the vain visions, and flattering divinations, even within the house of Israel, to whom were committed the oracles of God. No marvel if those that deceived themselves by worshipping pretended deities deceived themselves also by crediting pretended prophecies, to which strong delusions God justly gave them up for their idolatries. 3. These sayings had become proverbial; they were industriously spread among the people, so that they had got into every one's mouth, and not only so,

but were generally assented to, as proverbs usually are, not only the proverbs of the ancients, but those of the moderns too. Note, It is a token of universal degeneracy in a nation when corrupt and wicked sayings have grown proverbial; and it is an artifice of Satan by them to confirm men in their prejudices against the word and ways of God, and a great offence to the God of heaven. It will not serve for an excuse, in saying ill, to plead that it is a common saying.

II. How they are assured that they do but deceive themselves, for the judgments shall be hastened, these profane proverbs shall be confronted: *Tell them, therefore, The days are at hand* (v. 23), and again, *There shall none of my words be prolonged any more*, v. 28. Their putting the evil day far from them does but provoke God to bring it the sooner upon them; and it will be so much the sorer, so much the heavier, so much the more a surprise and terror to them when it does come. He must tell them,

1. That God will certainly silence the lying proverbs, and the lying prophecies, with which they buoyed up their vain hopes, and will make them ashamed of both (1): *I will make this proverb to cease*; for when they find the days of vengeance have come, and not one iota or tittle of the prediction falls to the ground, they will be ashamed to use it as a proverb in Israel, *The days are prolonged, and the vision fails*. Note, Those that will not have their eyes opened and their mistakes rectified, by the word of God, shall be undeceived by his judgments: for every mouth that speaks perverse things shall be stopped. (2.) *There shall be no more any vain vision*, v. 24. The false prophets, who told the people they should have peace and should soon see an end of their troubles, shall be disproved by the event, and then shall be ashamed of their pretensions, and shall hide their heads and impose silence upon themselves. Note, As truth was older than error, so it will survive it; it got the start, and it will get the race. The true prophets' visions and predictions stand, and are in full force, power, and virtue; they give law, and receive credit, when the vain visions, and the flattering divinations, are lost and forgotten, and shall be no more in the house of Israel; for great is the truth, and will prevail.

2. That God will certainly, and very shortly, accomplish every word that he has spoken. With what majesty does he say it (v. 25): *I am the LORD! I am Jehovah!* That glorious name of his speaks him a God giving being to his word by the performance of it, and therefore to the patriarchs, who lived by faith in a promise not yet performed, he was not known by his name *Jehovah*, Exod. vi. 3. But, as he is *Jehovah* in making good his promise, so he is in making good his threatenings. Let them know then that God, *with whom they have to do*, is the great *Jehovah*,

and therefore, (1.) He will speak, *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear: I am the Lord, I will speak*. God will have his saying, whoever gainsays it. God's oracles are called *lively ones*, for they still speak when the pagan oracles are long ago struck dumb. There has been, and shall be, a succession of God's ministers to the end of the world, by whom he will speak; and, though contempt may be put upon them, that shall not put a period to their ministration: *In your days, O rebellious house! will I say the word*. Even in the worst ages of the church God left not himself without witness, but raised up men that spoke for him, that spoke from him. *I will say the word*, the word that shall stand. (2.) The word that he speaks shall come to pass; it shall infallibly be accomplished according to the true intent and meaning of it, and according to the full extent and compass of it: *I will say the word and will perform it* (v. 25), for his mind is never changed, nor his arm shortened, nor is Infinite Wisdom ever nonplussed. With men saying and doing are two things, but they are not so with God; with him it is *dictum, factum—said, and done*. In the works of providence, as in those of creation, *he speaks and it is done*; for he said, *Let there be light, and there was light—Let there be a firmament, and there was a firmament*, Num. xiii. 19; 1 Sam. xv. 29. Whereas they had said, *Every vision fails* (v. 22), God says, "No, there shall be the effect of every vision (v. 23); it shall not return void, but every sign shall be answered by the thing signified." Those that see the visions of the Almighty do not see vain visions; God confirms the word of his servants by performing it. (3.) It shall be accomplished very shortly: "*The days are at hand* when you shall see the effect of every vision, v. 23. It is said, it is sworn, that delay shall be no longer (Rev. x. 6); the year of God's patience has now just expired, and he will no longer defer the execution of the sentence. *It shall be no more prolonged* (v. 25); he has borne with you a great while, but he will not bear always. *In your days, O rebellious house!* shall the word that is said be performed, and you shall see the threatened judgments and share in them. Behold, the Judge stands at the door. The righteous are taken away from the evil to come, but this rebellious house shall not be so quietly taken away; no, they shall live to be hurried away, to be chased out of the world." This is repeated (v. 28): *There shall none of my words be prolonged any more*, but judgment shall now hasten on apace; and the longer the bow has been in the drawing the deeper shall the arrow pierce." When we tell sinners of death and judgment, heaven and hell, and think by them to persuade them to a holy life, though we do not find them downright infidels (they will own that they do believe there is a state of rewards and punishments in the other world), yet they put by



the force of those great truths, and avoid the impressions of them, by looking upon the things of the other world as very remote; they tell us, "*The vision you see is for many days to come, and you prophesy of the times that are very far off*: it will be time enough to think of them when they come nearer," whereas really there is but a step between us and death, between us and an awful eternity; *yet a little while and the vision shall speak and not lie*, and therefore it concerns us to redeem time, and get ready with all speed for a future state; for, though it is future, it is very near, and while impenitent sinners slumber their damnation slumbers not.

## CHAP. XIII.

Mention had been made, in the chapter before, of the vain visions and flattering divinations with which the people of Israel suffered themselves to be imposed upon (ver. 24); now this whole chapter is levelled against them. God's faithful prophets are nowhere so sharp upon any sort of sinners as upon the false prophets, not because they were the most spiteful enemies to them, but because they put the highest affront upon God and did the greatest mischief to his people. The prophet here shows the sin and punishment, I. Of the false prophets, ver. 1—16. II. Of the false prophetesses, ver. 17—23. Both agreed to sooth men up in their sins, and, under pretence of comforting God's people, to flatter them with hopes that they should yet have peace; but the prophets shall be proved liars, their prophecies mere shams, and the expectations of the people illusions; for God will let them know that "the deceived and the deceiver are his," are both accountable to him, Job xii. 16.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; 3 Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! 4 O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. 5 Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. 6 They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. 7 Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? 8 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. 9 And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall

they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God.

The false prophets, who are here prophesied against, were some of them at Jerusalem (Jer. xxiii. 14): *I have seen in the prophets at Jerusalem a horrible thing*; some of them among the captives in Babylon, for to them Jeremiah writes (Jer. xxix. 8), *Let not your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you*. And as God's prophets, though at a distance from each other in place or time, yet preached the same truths, which was an evidence that they were guided by one and the same good Spirit, so the false prophets prophesied the same lies, being actuated by one and the same spirit of error. There were little hopes of bringing them to repentance, they were so hardened in their sin; yet Ezekiel must prophesy against them, in hopes that the people might be cautioned not to hearken to them; and thus a testimony will be left upon record against them, and they will thereby be left inexcusable.

Ezekiel had express orders to prophesy against the prophets of Israel; so they called themselves, as if none but they had been worthy of the name of Israel's prophets, who were indeed Israel's deceivers. But it is observable that Israel was never imposed upon by pretenders to prophecy till after they had rejected and abused the true prophets; as, afterwards, they were never deluded by counterfeit messiahs till after they had refused the true Messiah and rejected him. These false prophets must be required to hear the word of the Lord. They took upon them to speak what concerned others as from God; let them now hear what concerned themselves as from him. And two things the prophet is directed to do:—

I. To discover their sin to them, and to convince them of that if possible, or thereby to prevent their proceeding any further, by making manifest their folly unto all men, 2 Tim. iii. 9. They are here called *foolish prophets* (v. 3), men that did not at all understand the business they pretended to; to make fools of the people they made fools of themselves, and put the greatest cheat upon their own souls. Let us see what is here laid to their charge. 1. They pretend to have a commission from God, whereas he never sent them. They thrust themselves into the prophetic office, without warrant from him who is the Lord God of the holy prophets, which was a foolish thing; for how could they expect that God should own them in a work to which he never called them? They are *prophets out of their own hearts* (so the margin reads it, v. 2), prophets of their own making, v. 6. *They say, The Lord saith*; they pretend to be his messengers, but *the Lord has not sent them*, has not given them any orders. They counter-

feit the broad seal of heaven, than which they cannot do a greater indignity to mankind, for hereby they put a reproach upon divine revelation, lessen its credit, and weaken its credibility. When these pretenders are found to be deceivers, atheists and infidels will thence infer, 'They are all so. *The Lord has not sent them*; for though crafty enough in other things like the foxes, and very wise for the world, yet they are foolish prophets and have no experimental acquaintance with the things of God. Note, Foolish prophets are not of God's sending, for whom he sends he either finds fit or makes fit. Where he gives warrant he gives wisdom. 2. They pretend to have instructions from God, whereas he never made himself and his mind known to them: *They followed their own spirit* (v. 3); they delivered that as a message from God which was the product either of their subtle invention, to serve a turn for themselves, or of their own crazed and heated imagination, to give vent to a fancy. For *they have seen nothing*, they have not really had any heavenly vision; they pretend that what they say *the Lord saith* &c., but God disowns it: "*I have not spoken it*, I never said it, never meant any such thing." What they delivered was not what they had seen or heard, as that is which the ministers of Christ deliver (1 John i. 1), but either what they had dreamed or what they thought would please those they coveted to make an interest in; this is called their *seeing vanity and lying divination* (v. 6); they pretended to have seen that which they did not see, and produced that as a divine truth which they knew to be false. To the same purport (v. 7): *You have seen a vain vision and spoken a lying divination*, which had no divine original and would have no effect, but would certainly be disproved by the event; the words are changed (v. 8): *You have spoken vanity and seen lies*; what they saw and what they said was all alike, a mere sham; they saw nothing, they said nothing, to the purpose, nothing that could be relied on or that deserved regard. Again (v. 9), *They see vanity and divine lies*; they pretended to have had visions, as the true prophets had, whereas really they had none, but either it was the creature of their own fancy (they thought they had a vision, as men in a delirium do, that was *seeing vanity*) or it was a fiction of their own politics, and they knew they had none, and then they *saw lies, and divined lies*. See Jer. xxiii. 16, &c. Note, Since the devil is universally known to be the father of lies, those put the highest affront imaginable upon God who tell lies, and then father them upon him. But those that had put God's character upon Satan, in worshipping devils, arrived at length at such a pitch of impiety as to put Satan's character upon God. 3. They took no care to prevent the judgments of God that were breaking in upon the kingdom. They are like the foxes

in the deserts, running to and fro, and seeming to be in a great hurry, but it was to get away and shift for their own safety, not to do any good: *The hireling flees, and leaves the sheep*. They are like foxes that are greedy of prey for themselves, crafty and cruel to feed themselves. But (v. 5), "*You have not gone up into the gaps, nor made up the hedge of the house of Israel*. A breach is made in their fences, at which judgments are ready to pour in upon them, and then, if ever, is the time to do them service; but you have done nothing to help them." They should have made intercession for them, to turn away the wrath of God; but they were not praying prophets, had no interest in heaven nor intercourse with heaven (as prophets used to have, Gen. xx. 7) and so could do them no service that way. They should have made it their business by preaching and advice to bring people to repentance and reformation, and so have *made up the hedge*, and put a stop to the judgments of God; but this was none of their care: they contrived how to please people, not how to profit them. They saw a deluge of profaneness and impiety breaking in upon the land, waging war with virtue and holiness, and threatening to crush them and bear them down, and then they should have come in *to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty*, by witnessing against the wickedness of the time and place they lived in; but they thought that would be as dangerous a piece of service as standing in a breach to make it good against the besiegers, and therefore they declined it, did nothing to stem the tide, stood not in the battle against vice and immorality, but basely deserted the cause of religion and reformation, *in the day of the Lord*, when it was proclaimed, *Who is on the Lord's side? Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?* Ps. xciv. 16. Those were unworthy the name of prophets that could think so favourably of sin, and had so little zeal for God and the public welfare. 4. They flattered people into a vain hope that the judgments God had threatened would never come, whereby they hardened those in sin whom they should have endeavoured to turn from sin (v. 6): *They have made others to hope* that all should be well, and they should have peace, though they went on still in their trespasses, and that the event would confirm the word. They were still ready to say, "We will warrant you that these troubles will be at an end quickly, and we shall be in prosperity again," as if their warrants would confirm false prophecies, in defiance of God himself.

II. He is directed to denounce the judgments of God against them for these sins, from which their pretending to the character of prophets would not exempt them. 1. In general, here is a *woe* against them (v. 3), and what that woe is we are told (v. 8): *Behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God*. Note, Those are in a woeeful condi-



tion that have God against them. Woe, and a thousand woes, to those that have made him their enemy. 2. In particular, they are sentenced to be excluded from all the privileges of the commonwealth of Israel, for they are adjudged to have forfeited them all (v. 9): *God's hand shall be upon them*, to seize them and bring them to his bar, to shut them out from his presence, and they will find it a *fearful thing to fall into his hands*. They pretend to be prophets, particular favourites of heaven, and authorized to preside in the congregation of his church on earth; but, by pretending to the honours they were not entitled to, they lost those that otherwise they might have enjoyed, Matt. v. 19. Their doom is, (1.) To be expelled from the communion of saints, and not to be looked upon as belonging to it: *They shall not be in the secret of my people*; their folly shall be so clearly manifested that they shall never be consulted, nor their advice asked; they shall not be present at any debates about public affairs. Or, rather, they shall not be in the assembly of God's people for religious worship, for they shall be ashamed to show their heads there, when they are proved by the events to be false prophets, and, like Cain, shall *go out from the presence of the Lord*. The people that are deceived by them shall abandon them, and resolve to have no more to do with them. Those that usurped Moses's chair shall not be allowed so much as a door-keeper's place. In the great day they shall *not stand in the congregation of the righteous* (Ps. i. 5), when God *gathers his saints together to him* (Ps. l. 5, 16), *to be for ever with him*. (2.) To be expunged out of the book of the living. They shall die in their captivity, and shall die childless, shall leave no posterity to take their denomination from them, and so their names shall not be found among those who either themselves or their posterity returned out of Babylon, of whom a particular account was kept in a public register, which was called *the writing of the house of Israel*, such as we have Ezra ii. They shall not be found among the living in Jerusalem, Isa. iv. 3. Or they shall not be found written among those whom God has from eternity chosen to be vessels of his mercy to eternity. We read of those who *prophesied in Christ's name*, and yet he will tell them that he *never knew them* (Matt. vii. 22, 23), because they were not among those that were *given to him*. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *They shall not be written in the writing of eternal life, which is written for the righteous of the house of Israel*. See Ps. lxi. 28. (3.) To be for ever excluded from the land of Israel. God has sworn in his wrath concerning them that *they shall never enter with the returning captives into the land of Canaan*, which a second time remains a rest for them. Note, Those who oppose the design of God's threatenings, and will not be awed and in-

fluenced by them, forfeit the benefit of his promises, and cannot expect to be comforted and encouraged by them.

10 Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and *there was no peace*; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered *mortar*: 11 Say unto them which daub *it* with untempered *mortar*, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend *it*. 12 Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where *is* the daubing wherewith ye have daubed *it*? 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will even rend *it* with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in *my* fury to consume *it*. 14 So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered *mortar*, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 15 Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered *mortar*, and will say unto you, The wall *is* no *more*, neither they that daubed it; 16 *To wit*, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and *there is no peace*, saith the Lord God.

We have here more plain dealing with the false prophets, and some further articles of their doom. We have seen the people made ashamed of the false prophets (though sometimes they had been fond of them) and casting them away, as they shall do their false gods, with indignation; now here we find them as much ashamed of their false prophecies, which they had sometimes depended upon with much assurance. Observe,

I. How the people are deceived by the false prophets. Those flatterers seduce them, saying, *Peace, and there was no peace*, v. 10. They pretended to have *seen visions of peace*, v. 16. But that could not be, for *there was no peace, saith the Lord God*. There was no prosperity designed for them, and therefore there could be no ground for their security;

yet they told them that God was at peace with them, and had mercy in reserve for them, and that the war they were engaged in with the Chaldeans should soon end in an honourable peace, and their land should enjoy a happy repose and tranquillity. They told the idolaters and other sinners that there was neither harm nor danger in the way they were in. Thus they *seduced God's people*; they put a cheat upon them, led them into mistakes, and drew them aside out of that way of repentance and reformation which the other prophets were endeavouring to bring them into. Note, Those are the most dangerous seducers who suggest to sinners that which tends to lessen their dread of sin and their fear of God. Now this is compared to the building of a slight rotten wall, or, according to our Saviour's similitude, which is to the same purport with this (Matt. vii. 26), *the building of a house upon the sand*, which seems to be a shelter and protection for a while, but will fall when a storm comes. One false prophet built the wall, set up the notion that God was not at all displeased with Jerusalem, but that the city should be confirmed in its flourishing state, and be victorious over the powers that now threatened it. This notion was very pleasing, and he that started it made himself very acceptable by it and was caressed by every body, which invited others to say the same. They made the matter look yet more plausible and promising; they *daubed the wall*, which the first had built, but it was with *untempered mortar*, sorry stuff, that will not bind nor hold the bricks together; they had no ground for what they said, nor had it any consistency with itself, but was like ropes of sand. They did not strengthen the wall, were in no care to make it firm, to see that they went upon sure grounds; they only daubed it to hide the cracks and make it look well to the eye. And the wall thus built, when it comes to any stress, much more to any distress, will bulge and totter, and come down by degrees. Note, Doctrines that are groundless, though ever so grateful, that are not built upon a scripture foundation nor fastened with a scripture cement, though ever so plausible, ever so pleasing, are not of any worth, nor will stand men in any stead; and those hopes of peace and happiness which are not warranted by the word of God will but cheat men, like a wall that is well daubed indeed, but ill-built.

II. How they will be soon undeceived by the judgment of God, which, we are sure, is according to truth. 1. God will in anger bring a terrible storm that shall beat fiercely and furiously upon the wall. The descent which the Chaldean army shall make upon Judah, and the siege which they shall lay to Jerusalem, will be as an *overflowing shower*, or inundation (such as Solomon calls a *sweeping rain that leaves no food*, Prov. xxviii. 3), will bear down all before it, as the deluge

did in Noah's time: *You, O great hailstones: shall fall*, the artillery of heaven, every hailstone like a cannon-ball, battering this wall, and with these a *stormy wind*, which is sometimes so strong as to *rend the rocks* (1 Kings xix. 11), much more an ill-built wall, v. 11. But that which makes this *rain*, and *hail*, and *wind*, most terrible is that they arise from the wrath of God, and are enforced by that; it is that which sends them; it is that which gives them the setting on (v. 13); it is a *stormy wind in my fury*, and an *overflowing shower in my anger*, and *great hailstones in my fury*. The fury of Nebuchadnezzar and his princes, who highly resented Zedekiah's treachery, made the invasion very formidable, but that was nothing in comparison with God's displeasure. *The staff in their hand is my indignation*, Isa. x. 5. Note, An angry God has winds and storms at command wherewith to alarm secure sinners; and his wrath makes them frightful and forcible indeed; for *who can stand before him when he is angry?* 2. This storm shall overturn the wall: *it shall fall*, and the wind shall *rend it* (v. 11), the *hailstones shall consume it* (v. 13); I will *break it down* (v. 14) and *bring it to the ground*, so that the *foundation thereof shall be discovered*; it will appear how false, how rotten it was, to the prophetic reproach of the builders. When the Chaldean army has made Judah and Jerusalem desolate then this credit of the prophets, and the hopes of the people, will both sink together; the former will be found false in flattering the people and the latter foolish in suffering themselves to be imposed upon by them, and so exposed to so much the greater confusion, when the judgment shall surprise them in their security. Note, Whatever men think to shelter themselves with against the judgments of God, while they continue unreformed, will prove but a *refuge of lies* and will not profit them *in the day of wrath*. See Isa. xxviii. 17. Men's anger cannot shake that which God has built (for *the blast of the terrible ones is but as a storm against the wall*, which makes a great noise, but never stirs the wall; see Isa. xxv. 4), but God's anger will overthrow that which men have built in opposition to him. They and all their attempts, they and all the securities wherein they intrench themselves, shall be as a *bowing wall* and as a *tottering fence* (Ps. lxxii. 3, 10); and when their vain predictions are disproved, and their vain expectations disappointed, then it will be discovered that there was no ground for either, Hab. iii. 13. *The day will declare what every man's work is*, and *the fire will try it*, 1 Cor. iii. 13. 3. The builders of the wall, and those that daubed it, will themselves be buried in the ruins of it: *It shall fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst thereof*, v. 14. And thus the threatenings of God's wrath, and all the just intentions of it, shall be accomplished to the uttermost, both upon *the wall* and upon those *that have*



*daubed it*, v. 15. The same judgments that will prove the false prophets to be false will punish them for their falsehood; and they themselves shall be involved in the calamity which they made the people believe there was no danger of, and become monuments of that justice which they bade defiance to. Thus, if *the blind lead the blind*, both the blind leaders and the blind followers will *fall together into the ditch*. Note, Those that deceive others will in the end prove to have deceived themselves; and no doom will be more fearful than that of unfaithful ministers, that flattered sinners in their sins. 4. Both the deceivers and the deceived, when they thus perish together, will justly be ridiculed and triumphed over (v. 12): *When the wall has fallen shall it not be said unto you*, by those that gave credit to the true prophets, and feared the word of the Lord, "Now *where is the daubing wherewith you have daubed the wall?* What has become of all the fine soft words and fair promises wherewith you flattered your wicked neighbours, and all the assurances you gave them that the troubles of the nation should soon be at an end? *The righteous shall laugh at them*, the righteous God shall, righteous men shall, saying, *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength*, Ps. lii. 6, 7. *I also will laugh at your calamity*, Prov. i. 26. They will say unto you (v. 15), "*The wall is no more, neither he that daubed it*; your hopes have vanished, and those that supported them, even the prophets of Israel," v. 16. Note, Those that usurp the honours that do not belong to them will shortly be filled with the shame that does.

17 Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them, 18 And say, Thus the Lord God; Woe to the *women* that sew pillows to all armholes, and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of my people, and will ye save the souls alive *that come unto you?* 19 And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear *your lies?* 20 Wherefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, *I am* against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make *them* fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, *even*

the souls that ye hunt to make *them* fly. 21 Your kerchiefs also will I tear, and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that *I am* the Lord. 22 Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: 23 Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that *I am* the Lord.

As God has promised that when he pours out his Spirit upon his people both *their sons and their daughters shall prophesy*, so the devil, when he acts as a spirit of lies and falsehood, is so in the mouth not only of false prophets, but of false prophetesses too, and those are the deceivers whom the prophet is here directed to prophesy against; for they are not such despicable enemies to God's truths as deserve not to be taken notice of, nor yet will either the weakness of their sex excuse their sin or the tenderness and respect that are owing to it exempt them from the reproaches and threatenings of the word of God. No: *Son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people*, v. 17. God takes no pleasure in owning them for his people. They are *thy people*, as Exod. xxxii. 7. The women pretend to a spirit of prophecy, and are in the same song with the men, as Ahab's prophets were: *Go on, and prosper.* They *prophesy out of their own heart* too; they say what comes uppermost and what they know nothing of. Therefore *prophesy against them* from God's own mouth. The prophet must *set his face against them*, and try if they can look him in the face and stand to what they say. Note, When sinners grow very impudent it is time for reprovers to be very bold. Now observe,

I. How the sin of these false prophetesses is described, and what are the particulars of it. 1. They told deliberate lies to those who consulted them, and came to them to be advised, and to be told their fortune: "*You do mischief by your lying to my people that hear your lies* (v. 19); they come to be told the truth, but you tell them lies; and, because you humour them in their sins, they are willing to hear you." Note, It is ill with those people who can better hear pleasing lies than unpleasant truths; and it is a temptation to those who lie in wait to deceive to tell lies when they find people willing to hear them and to excuse themselves with this, *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur*—If the people will be deceived, let them. 2. They

profaned the name of God by pretending to have received those lies from him (v. 19): *You pollute my name among my people*, and make use of that for the patronising of your lies and the gaining of credit to them." Note, Those greatly pollute God's holy name that make use of it to give countenance to falsehood and wickedness. Yet this they did for *handfuls of barley and pieces of bread*. They did it for gain; they cared not what dishonour they did to God's name by their lying, so they could but make a hand of it for themselves. There is nothing so sacred which men of mercenary spirits, in whom the love of this world reigns, will not profane and prostitute, if they can but get money by the bargain. But they did it for poor gain; if they could get no more for it, rather than break they would sell you a false prophecy that should please you to a nicety for the beggar's dole, a *piece of bread or a handful of barley*; and yet that was more than it was worth. Had they asked it as an alms, for God's sake, surely they might have had it, and God would have been honoured; but, taking it as a fee for a false prophecy, God's name is polluted, and the smallness of the reward heightens the offence. For a *piece of bread that man will transgress*, Prov. xxviii. 21. Had their poverty been their temptation to steal, and so to take the name of the Lord in vain, it would not have been nearly so bad as when it tempted them to *prophecy lies in his name* and so to profane it. 3. They kept people in awe, and terrified them with their pretensions: "*You hunt the souls of my people* (v. 18), *hunt them to make them flee* (v. 20), *hunt them into gardens* (so the margin reads it); you use all the arts you have to court or compel them into those places where you deliver your pretended predictions, or you have got such an influence upon them that you make them do just as you would have them to do, and tyrannise over them." It was indeed the people's fault that they did regard them, but it was their fault by lies and falsehoods to command that regard; they pretended to *save the souls alive that came to them*, v. 18. If they would but be hearers of them, and contributors to them, they might be sure of salvation; thus they beguiled unstable souls that had a concern about salvation as their end but did not rightly understand the way, and therefore hearkened to those who were most confident in promising it to them. "But will you pretend to save souls, or secure salvation to your party?" Those are justly suspected that make such pretensions. 4. They discouraged those that were honest and good, and encouraged those that were wicked and profane: *You slay the souls that should not die, and save those alive that should not live*, v. 19. This is explained (v. 22): *You have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad*; because they would not, they durst not, countenance your preten-

sions, you thundered out the judgments of God against them, to their great grief and trouble; you put them under invidious characters, to make them either despicable or odious to the people, and pretended to do it in God's name, which made them go many a time with a sad heart; whereas it was the will of God that they should be comforted, and by having respect put upon them should have encouragement given them. But on the other side, and which is still worse, you have *strengthened the hands of the wicked* and emboldened them to go on in their *wicked ways* and not to return from them, which was the thing the true prophets with earnestness called them to. "You have promised sinners life in their sinful ways, have told them that they shall have peace though they go on, by which their *hands have been strengthened* and their hearts hardened." Some think this refers to the severe censures they passed upon those who had already gone into captivity (who were humbled under their affliction, by which their *hearts were made sad*), and the commendations they gave to those who rebelled against the king of Babylon, who were hardened in their impieties, by which their *hands were strengthened*; or by their polluting the name of God they saddened the hearts of good people who have a value and veneration for the word of God, and confirmed atheists and infidels in their contempt of divine revelation and furnished them with arguments against it. Note, Those have a great deal to answer for who grieve the spirits, and weaken the hands, of good people, and who gratify the lusts of sinners, and animate them in their opposition to God and religion. Nor can any thing strengthen the hands of sinners more than to tell them that they may be saved in their sins without repentance, or that there may be repentance though they do not return from their wicked ways. 5. They mimicked the true prophets, by giving signs for the illustrating of their false predictions (as Hananiah did, Jer. xxviii. 10), and they were signs agreeable to their sex; they *sowed little pillows to the people's arm-holes*, to signify that they might be easy and repose themselves, and needed not be disquieted with the apprehensions of trouble approaching. And they *made kerchiefs upon the head of every stature*, of persons of every age, young and old, distinguishable by their stature, v. 18. These kerchiefs were badges of liberty or triumph, intimating that they should not only be delivered from the Chaldeans, but be victorious over them. Some think these were some superstitious rites which they used with those to whom they delivered their divinations, preparing them for the reception of them by putting enchanted pillows under their arms and handkerchiefs on their heads, to raise their fancies and their expectations of something great. Or perhaps the expressions are figurative: they did all they could



to make people secure, which is signified by laying them easy, and to make people proud, which is signified by dressing them fine with handkerchiefs, perhaps laid or embroidered on their heads.

II. How the wrath of God against them is expressed. Here is a woe to them (v. 18), and God declares himself against the methods they took to delude and deceive, v. 20. But what course will God take with them? 1. They shall be confounded in their attempts, and shall proceed no further; for (v. 23) you shall see no more vanity nor divine revelations; not that they shall themselves lay down their pretensions in a way of repentance, but when the event gives them the lie they shall be silent for shame; or their fancies and imaginations shall not be disposed to receive impressions which assist them in their divinations as they have been; or they themselves shall be cut off. 2. God's people shall be delivered out of their hands. When they see themselves deluded by them into a false peace and a fool's paradise, and that though they would not leave their sin their sin has left them, and they see no more vanity nor divine divinations, they shall turn their back upon them, shall slight their predictions. The righteous shall be no more saddened by them, no, nor the wicked strengthened: The pillows shall be torn from their arms, and the kerchiefs from their heads; the fallacies shall be discovered, their frauds detected, and the people of God shall no more be in their hand, to be hunted as they had been. Note, It is a great mercy to be delivered from a servile regard to, and fear of, those who, under colour of a divine authority, impose upon and tyrannise over the consciences of men, and say to their souls, Bow down, that we may go over. But it is a sore grief to those who delight in such usurpations to have their power broken and the prey delivered; such was the reformation to the church of Rome. And, when God does this, he makes it to appear that he is the Lord, that it is his prerogative to give law to souls.

#### CHAP. XIV.

Hearing the word, and prayer, are two great ordinances of God, in which we are to give honour to him and may hope to find favour and acceptance with him; and yet in this chapter, to our great surprise, we find some waiting upon God in the one and some in the other and yet not meeting with success as they expected. I. The elders of Israel come to hear the word, and enquire of the prophet, but, because they are not duly qualified, they meet with a rebuke instead of acceptance (ver. 1-5) and are called upon to repent of their sins and reform their lives, else it is at their peril to enquire of God, ver. 6-11. II. Noah, Daniel, and Job, are supposed to pray for this people, and yet, because the decree has gone forth, and the destruction of them is determined by a variety of judgments, their prayers shall not be answered, ver. 12-21. And yet it is promised, in the close, that a remnant shall escape, ver. 22, 23.

**T**HEN came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-

block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them? 4 Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; 5 That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. 6 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself: 8 And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. 9 And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. 10 And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; 11 That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God.

Here is, I. The address which some of the elders of Israel made to the prophet, as an oracle, to enquire of the Lord by him. They came, and sat before him, v. 1. It is probable that they were not of those who were now his fellow-captives, and constantly attended his ministry (such as those we read of ch.

viii. 1), but some occasional hearers, some of the grandees of Jerusalem who had come upon business to Babylon, perhaps public business, on an embassy from the king, and in their way called on the prophet, having heard much of him and being desirous to know if he had any message from God, which might be some guide to them in their negotiation. By the severe answer given them one would suspect they had a design to ensnare the prophet, or to try if they could catch hold of any thing that might look like a contradiction to Jeremiah's prophecies, and so they might have occasion to reproach them both. However, they feigned themselves just men, complimented the prophet, and sat before him gravely enough, as God's people used to sit. Note, It is no new thing for bad men to be found employed in the external performances of religion.

II. The account which God gave the prophet privately concerning them. They were strangers to him; he only knew that they were *elders of Israel*; that was the character they wore, and as such he received them with respect, and, it is likely, was glad to see them so well disposed. But God gives him their real character (v. 3); they were idolaters, and did only consult Ezekiel as they would any oracle of a pretended deity, to gratify their curiosity, and therefore he appeals to the prophet himself whether they deserved to have any countenance or encouragement given them: "*Should I be enquired of at all by them?*" Should I accept their enquiries as an honour to myself, or answer them for satisfaction to them? No; they have no reason to expect it;" for, 1. *They have set up their idols in their heart*; they not only have idols, but they are in love with them, they dote upon them, are wedded to them, and have laid them so near their hearts, and have given them so great a room in their affections, that there is no parting with them. The idols they have set up in their houses, though they are now at a distance from the chambers of their imagery, yet they have them in their hearts, and they are ever and anon worshipping them in their fancies and imaginations. *They have made their idols to ascend upon their hearts* (so the word is); they have subjected their hearts to their idols, they are upon the throne there. Or when they came to enquire of the prophet they pretended to put away their idols, but it was in pretence only; they still had a secret reserve for them. They kept them *up in their hearts*; and, if they left them for a while, it was *cum animo revertendi*—with an intention to return to them, not a final farewell. Or it may be understood of spiritual idolatry; those whose affections are placed upon the wealth of the world and the pleasures of sense, whose god is their money, whose god is their belly, they set up their idols in their heart. Many who have no idols in their sanctuary have idols in their hearts,

which is no less a usurpation of God's throne and a profanation of his name. *Little children, keep yourselves from those idols.* 2. *They put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face.* Their silver and gold were called the *stumbling-block of their iniquity* (ch. vii. 19), their idols of silver and gold, by the beauty of which they were allured to idolatry, and so it was the block at which they stumbled, and fell into that sin; or their iniquity is their *stumbling-block*, which throws them down, so that they fall into ruin. Note, Sinners are their own tempters (*every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust*), and so they are their own destroyers. *If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*; and thus they put the *stumbling-block of their iniquity before their own faces*, and stumble upon it though they see it before their eyes. It intimates that they are resolved to go on in sin, whatever comes of it. *I have loved strangers, and after them I will go*; that is the language of their hearts. And should God be enquired of by such wretches? Do they not hereby rather put an affront upon him than do him any honour, as those did who bowed the knee to Christ in mockery? Can those expect an answer of peace from God who thus continue their acts of hostility against him? "Ezekiel, what thinkest thou of it?"

III. The answer which God, in just displeasure, orders Ezekiel to give them, v. 4. Let them know that it is not out of any disrespect to their persons that God refuses to give them an answer, but it is laid down as a rule for *every man of the house of Israel*, whoever he be, that if he continue in love and league with his idols, and come to enquire of God, God will resent it as an indignity done to him, and will answer him according to his real iniquity, not according to his pretended piety. He comes to the prophet, who, he expects, will be civil to him, but God will give him his answer, by punishing him for his impudence: *I the Lord, who speak and it is done, I will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols.* Observe, Those who set up idols in their hearts, and set their hearts upon their idols, commonly have a multitude of them. Humble worshippers God answers according to the multitude of his mercies, but bold intruders he answers according to the multitude of their idols, that is, 1. According to the desire of their idols; he will give them up to their own hearts' lust, and leave them to themselves to be as bad as they have a mind to be, till they have filled up the measure of their iniquity. Men's corruptions are idols in their hearts, and they are of their own setting up; their temptations are the *stumbling-block of their iniquity*, and they are of their own putting, and God will answer them accordingly; let them take their course. 2. According to the desert of their idols; they shall have such an an-



swer as it is just that such idolaters should have. God will punish them as he usually punishes idolaters, that is, when they stand in need of his help he will send them to the gods whom they have chosen, Judg. x. 13, 14. Note, The judgment of God will dwell with men according to what they are really (that is, according to what their hearts are), not according to what they are in show and profession. And what will be the end of this? What will this threatened answer amount to? He tells them (v. 5): *That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart*, may lay them open to the world, that they may be ashamed; nay, lay them open to the curse, that they may be ruined. Note, The sin and shame, and pain and ruin, of sinners, are all from themselves, and their own hearts are the snares in which they are taken; they seduce them, they betray them; their own consciences witness against them, condemn them, and are a terror to them. If God take them, if he discover them, if he convict them, if he bind them over to his judgment, it is all by *their own hearts*. *O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself. The house of Israel is ruined by its own hands, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.* Note, (1.) The ruin of sinners is owing to their estrangement from God. (2.) It is through some idol or other that the hearts of men are estranged from God; some creature has gained that place and dominion in the heart that God should have.

IV. The extent of this answer which God had given them—to all the house of Israel, v. 7, 8. The same thing is repeated, which intimates God's just displeasure against hypocrites, who mock him with the shows and forms of devotion, while their hearts are estranged from him and at war with him. Observe, 1. To whom this declaration belongs. It concerns not only every one of the house of Israel (as before, v. 4), but the *stranger that sojourns in Israel*; let him not think it will be an excuse for him in his idolatries that he is but a stranger and a sojourner in Israel, and does but worship the gods that his father served and that he himself was bred up in the service of; no, let him not expect any benefit from Israel's oracles or prophets unless he thoroughly renounce his idolatry. Note, Even proselytes shall not be countenanced if they be not sincere: a dissembled conversion is no conversion. 2. The description here given of hypocrites: *They separate themselves from God by their fellowship with idols*; they cut themselves off from their relation to God and their interest in him; they break off their acquaintance and intercourse with him, and set themselves at a distance from him. Note, Those that join themselves to idols separate themselves from God; nor shall any be for ever separated from the vision and fruition of God, but such as now separate themselves from his service and

wilfully withdraw their allegiance from him. But there are those who thus separate themselves from God, and yet come to the prophets with a seeming respect and deference to their office, to enquire of them concerning God, in order to satisfy a vain curiosity, to stop the mouth of a clamorous conscience, or to get or save a reputation among men, but without any desire to be acquainted with God or any design to be ruled by him. 3. The doom of those who thus trifle with God and think to impose upon him: *"I the Lord will answer him by myself"*; let me alone to deal with him; I will give him an answer that shall fill him with confusion, that shall make him repent of his daring impiety." He shall have his answer, not by the words of the prophet, but by the judgments of God. *And I will set my face against that man*, which denotes great displeasure against him and a fixed resolution to ruin him. God can outface the most impenitent sinner. The hypocrite thought to save his credit, nay, and to gain applause, but, on the contrary, God will make him a sign and a proverb, will inflict such judgments upon him as shall make him remarkable and contemptible in the eyes of all about him; his misery shall be made use of to express the greatest misery, as when the worst of sinners are said to have *their portion appointed them with hypocrites*, Matt. xxiv. 51. God will make him an example; his judgments upon him shall be for warning to others to take heed of mocking God: *for thus shall it be done to the man that separates himself from God*, and yet pretends to enquire concerning him. The hypocrite thought to pass for one of God's people, and to crowd into heaven among them; but God will cut him off from the midst of his people, will discover him, and pluck him out from the thickest of them; and by this, says God, *you shall know that I am the Lord*. By the discovery of hypocrites it appears that God is omniscient: ministers know not how people stand affected when they come to hear the word, but God does. And by the punishment of hypocrites it appears that he is a jealous God, and one that cannot and will not be imposed upon.

V. The doom of those pretenders to prophecy who give countenance to these pretenders to piety, v. 9, 10. These hypocritical enquirers, though Ezekiel will not give them a comfortable answer, yet hope to meet with some other prophets that will; and if they do, as perhaps they may, let them know that God permits those lying prophets to deceive them in part of punishment: *"If the prophet that flatters them be deceived"*, and gives them hopes which there is no ground for, *I the Lord have deceived that prophet*, have suffered the temptation to be laid before him, and suffered him to yield to it, and overruled it for the hardening of those in their wicked courses who were resolved to go on in them."



We are sure that God is not the author of sin, but we are sure that he is the Lord of all and the Judge of sinners, and that he often makes use of one wicked man to destroy another, and so of one wicked man to deceive another. Both are sins in him who does them, and so they are *not* from God; both are punishments to him to whom they are done, and so they *are* from God. We have a full instance of this in the story of Ahab's prophets, who were deceived by a lying spirit, which God put into their mouths (1 Kings xxii. 23), and another in those whom God gives up to strong delusions, to believe a lie, because they received not the love of the truth, 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. But read the fearful doom of the lying prophet: *I will stretch out my hand upon him and will destroy him.* When God has served his own righteous purposes by him he shall be reckoned with for his unrighteous purposes. As, when God had made use of the Chaldeans for the wasting of a sinful people, he justly punished them for their rage, so when he had made use of false prophets, and afterwards of false Christs, for the deceiving of a sinful people, he justly punished them for their falsehood. But herein we must acknowledge (as Calvin upon this place reminds us) that God's judgments are a great deep, that we are incompetent judges of them, and that, though we cannot account for the equity of God's proceedings to the satisfying and silencing of every caviller, yet there is a day coming when he will be justified before all the world, and particularly in this instance, when the punishment of the prophet that flattereth the hypocrite in his evil way shall be as the punishment of the hypocrite that seeketh to him and bespeaks smooth things only, Isa. xxx. 10. The ditch shall be the same to the blind leader and the blind followers.

VI. The good counsel that is given them for the preventing of this fearful doom (v. 6): "*Therefore repent and turn yourselves from your idols. Let this separate between you and them, that they separate between you and God; because they set God's face against you, do you turn away your faces from them,*" which denotes, not only forsaking them, but forsaking them with loathing and detestation: "*Turn from them as from abominations that you are sick of; and then you will be welcome to enquire of the Lord. Come now, and let us reason together.*"

VII. The good issue of all this as to the house of Israel; therefore the pretending prophets, and the pretending saints, shall perish together by the judgments of God, that, some being made examples, the body of the people may be reformed, that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, v. 11. Note, The punishments of some are designed for the prevention of sin, that others may hear, and fear, and take warning. When we see what becomes of those that go astray from God we should thereby be engaged to keep close to

him. And, if the house of Israel go not astray, they will not be polluted any more. Note, Sin is a polluting thing; it renders the sinner odious in the eyes of the pure and holy God, and in his own eyes too whenever conscience is awakened; and therefore they shall no more be polluted, that they may be my people and I may be their God. Note, Those whom God takes into covenant with himself must first be cleansed from the pollutions of sin; and those who are so cleansed shall not only be saved from ruin, but be entitled to all the privileges of God's people.

12 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, 13 Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: 14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. 15 If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts: 16 Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. 17 Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it: 18 Though these three men were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered themselves. 19 Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: 20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness. 21 For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast? 22 Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be;



brought forth, *both* sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings: and ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, *even* concerning all that I have brought upon it. 23 And they shall comfort you, when ye see their ways and their doings: and ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord God.

The scope of these verses is to show,

I. That national sins bring national judgments. When virtue is ruined and laid waste every thing else will soon be ruined and laid waste too (v. 13): *When the land sins against me*, when vice and wickedness become epidemical, *when the land sins by trespassing grievously*, when the sinners have become very numerous and their sins very heinous, when gross impieties and immoralities universally prevail, *then will I stretch forth my hand upon it*, for the punishment of it. The divine power shall be vigorously and openly exerted; the judgments shall be extended and stretched forth to all the corners of the land, to all the concerns and interests of the nation. Grievous sins bring grievous plagues.

II. That God has a variety of sore judgments wherewith to punish sinful nations, and he has them all at command and inflicts which he pleases. He did indeed give David his choice what judgment he would be punished with for his sin in numbering the people; for any of them would serve to answer the end, which was to lessen the numbers he was proud of; but David, in effect, referred it to God again: "*Let us fall into the hands of the Lord*"; let him choose with what rod we shall be beaten." But he uses a variety of judgments that it may appear he has a universal dominion, and that in all our concerns we may see our dependence on him. *Four sore judgments* are here specified:—1. *Famine*, v. 13. The denying and withholding of common mercies is itself judgment enough, there needs no more to make a people miserable. God needs not bring the staff of oppression, it is but *breaking the staff of bread* and the work is soon done; he *cuts off man and beast* by cutting off the provisions which nature makes for both in the annual products of the earth. God *breaks the staff of bread* when, though we have bread, yet we are not nourished and strengthened by it. Hag. i. 6, *You eat, but you have not enough*. 2. *Hurtful beasts*, *noisome* and *noxious*, either as poisonous or as ravenous. God can make these to *pass through the land* (v. 15), to increase in all parts of it, and to bereave it, not only of the tame cattle, preying upon their flocks and

herds, but of their people, devouring men, women, and children, so *that no man may pass through because of the beasts*; none dare travel even in the high roads for fear of being pulled in pieces by lions, or other beasts of prey, as the children of Beth-el by two bears. Note, When men revolt from their allegiance to God, and rebel against him, it is just with God that the inferior creatures should rise up in arms against man, Lev. xxvi. 22. 3. *War*. God often chastises sinful nations by bringing a sword upon them, the sword of a foreign enemy, and he gives it its commission and orders what execution it shall do (v. 17): he says, *Sword, go through the land*. It is bad enough if the sword do but enter into the borders of a land, but much worse when it goes through the bowels of a land. By it God *cuts off man and beast*, horse and foot. What execution the sword does God does by it; for it is his sword, and it acts as he directs. 4. *Pestilence* (v. 19), a dreadful disease, which has sometimes depopulated cities; by it God *pours out his fury in blood* (that is, in death); the pestilence kills as effectually as if the blood were shed by the sword, for it is poisoned by the disease, *the sickness* we call it. See how miserable the case of mankind is that lies thus exposed to deaths in various shapes. See how dangerous the case of sinners is against whom God has so many ways of fighting, so that, though they escape one judgment, God has another waiting for them.

III. That when God's professing people revolt from him, and rebel against him, they may justly expect a complication of judgments to fall upon them. God has various ways of contending with a sinful nation; but if Jerusalem, the holy city, *become a harlot*, God will send upon her all his *four sore judgments* (v. 21); for the nearer any are to God in name and profession the more severely will he reckon with them if they reproach that worthy name by which they are called and give the lie to that profession. They shall be punished *seven times more*.

IV. That there may be, and commonly are, some few very good men, even in those places that by sin are ripened for ruin. It is no foreign supposition that, even in a land that has *trespassed grievously*, there may be *three such men as Noah, Daniel, and Job*. Daniel was now living, and at this time had scarcely arrived at the prime of his eminency, but he was already famous (at least this word of God concerning him would without fail make him so); yet he was carried away into captivity with the first of all, Dan. i. 6. Some of the better sort of people in Jerusalem might perhaps think that, if Daniel (of whose fame in the king of Babylon's court they had heard much) had but continued in Jerusalem, it would have been spared for his sake, as the magicians in Babylon were. "No," says God, "though you had him, who was as eminently good in bad times

and places as Noah in the old world and Job in the land of Uz, yet a reprieve should not be obtained." In the places that are most corrupt, and in the ages that are most degenerate, *there is a remnant* which God reserves to himself, and which *still hold fast their integrity* and stand fair for the honour of *delivering the land*, as *the innocent* are said to do, Job xxii. 30.

V. That God often spares very wicked places for the sake of a few godly people in them. This is implied here as the expectation of Jerusalem's friends in the day of its distress: "Surely God will stay his controversy with us; for are there not some among us that are emptying the measure of national guilt by their prayers, as others are filling it by their sins? And, rather than God will *destroy the righteous with the wicked*, he will preserve *the wicked with the righteous*. If Sodom might have been spared for the sake of ten good men, surely Jerusalem may."

VI. That such men as Noah, Daniel, and Job, will prevail, if any can, to turn away the wrath of God from a sinful people. Noah was a perfect man, and kept his integrity when all flesh had corrupted their way; and, for his sake, his family, though one of them was wicked (Ham), was saved in the ark. Job was a great example of piety, and mighty in prayer for his children, for his friends; and God turned his captivity when he prayed. Those were very ancient examples, before Moses, that great intercessor; and therefore God mentions them, to intimate that he had some very peculiar favourites long before the Jewish nation was formed or founded, and would have such when it was ruined, for which reason, it should seem, those names were made use of, rather than Moses, Aaron, or Samuel; and yet, lest any should think that God was partial in his respects to the ancient days, here is a modern instance, a living one, placed between those two that were the glories of antiquity, and he now a captive, and that is Daniel, to teach us not to lessen the useful good men of our own day by over-magnifying the ancients. Let the children of the captivity know that Daniel, their neighbour, and *companion in tribulation*, being a man of great humility, piety, and zeal for God, and instant and constant in prayer, had as good an interest in heaven as Noah or Job had. Why may not God raise up as great and good men now as he did formerly, and do as much for them?

VII. That when the sin of a people has come to its height, and the decree has gone forth for their ruin, the piety and prayers of the best men shall not prevail to finish the controversy. This is here asserted again and again, that, *though these three men were in Jerusalem at this time*, yet they should *deliver neither son nor daughter*; not so much as the little ones should be spared for their

sakes, as the little ones of Israel were upon the prayer of Moses, Num. xiv. 31. No; *the land shall be desolate*, and God would not hear their prayers for it, though *Moses and Samuel stood before him*, Jer. xv. 1. Note, Abused patience will turn at last into inexorable wrath; and it should seem as if God would be more inexorable in Jerusalem's case than in another (v. 6), because, besides the divine patience, they had enjoyed greater privileges than any other people, which were the aggravations of their sin.

VIII. That, though pious praying men may not prevail to deliver others, yet *they shall deliver their own souls by their righteousness*, so that, though they may suffer in the common calamity, yet to them the property of it is altered; it is not to them what it is to the wicked; it is unstrung, and does them no hurt; it is sanctified, and does them good. Sometimes *their souls* (their lives) are remarkably *delivered*, and *given them for a prey*; at least *their souls* (their spiritual interests) are secured. If their bodies be not *delivered*, yet *their souls* are. *Riches indeed profit not in the day of wrath*, but *righteousness delivers from death*, from so great a death, so many deaths as are here threatened. This should encourage us to keep our integrity in times of common apostasy, that, if we do so, we shall be *hidden in the day of the Lord's anger*.

IX. That, even when God makes the greatest desolations by his judgments, he reserves some to be the monuments of his mercy, v. 22, 23. In Jerusalem itself, though marked for utter ruin, yet *there shall be left a remnant*, who shall not be cut off by any of those *sore judgments* before mentioned, but shall be carried into captivity, both *sons and daughters*, who shall be the seed of a new generation. The young ones, who had not grown up to such an obstinacy in sin as their fathers had who were therefore cut off as incurable, these *shall be brought forth* out of the ruins of Jerusalem by the victorious enemy, and *behold they shall come forth to you* that are in captivity, they shall make a virtue of a necessity, and shall come the more willingly to Babylon because so many of their friends have gone thither before them and are there ready to receive them; and, when they come, *you shall see their ways and their doings*; you shall hear them make a free and ingenuous confession of the sins they had formerly been guilty of, and a humble profession of repentance for them, with promises of reformation; and you shall see instances of their reformation, shall see what good their affliction has done them, and how prudently and patiently they conduct themselves under it. Their narrow escape shall have a good effect upon them; it shall change their temper and conversation, and make them new men. And this will redound, 1. To the satisfaction of their brethren: *They shall comfort you when you*



see their ways. Note, It is a very comfortable sight to see people, when they are under the rod, repenting and humbling themselves, justifying God and accepting the punishment of their iniquity. When we sorrow (as we ought to do) for the afflictions of others, it is a great comfort to us in our sorrow to see them improving their afflictions and making a good use of them: When those captives told their friends how bad they had been, and how righteous God was in bringing these judgments upon them, it made them very easy, and helped to reconcile them to the calamities of Jerusalem, to the justice of God in punishing his own people so, and to the goodness of God, which now appeared to have had kind intentions in all; and thus "*You shall be comforted concerning all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem*, and, when you better understand the thing, shall not have such direful apprehensions concerning it as you have had." Note, It is a debt we owe to our brethren, if we have got good by our afflictions, to comfort them by letting them know it. 2. It will redound to the honour of God: "*You shall know that I have not done without cause*, not without a just provocation, and yet not without a gracious design, *all that I have done in it*." Note, When afflictions have done their work, and have accomplished that for which they were sent, then will appear the wisdom and goodness of God in sending them, and God will be not only justified, but glorified in them.

CHAP. XV.

Ezekiel has again and again, in God's name, foretold the utter ruin of Jerusalem; but, it should seem, he finds it hard to reconcile himself to it, and to acquiesce in the will of God in this severe dispensation; and therefore God takes various methods to satisfy him not only that it shall be so, but that there is no remedy: it must be so; it is fit that it should be so. Here, in this short chapter, he shows him (probably with design that he should tell the people) that it was as requisite Jerusalem should be destroyed as that the dead and withered branches of a vine should be cut off and thrown into the fire. I. The similitude is very elegant (ver. 1-5), but, II. The explanation of the similitude is very dreadful, ver. 6-8.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, what is the vine-tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? 3 Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? 4 Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work? 5 Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned? 6 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; As the vine-tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so

will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 7 And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. 8 And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord God.

The prophet, we may suppose, was thinking what a glorious city Jerusalem was, above any city in the world; it was the crown and joy of the whole earth; and therefore what a pity it was that it should be destroyed; it was a noble structure, the city of God, and the city of Israel's solemnities. But, if these were the thoughts of his heart, God here returns an answer to them by comparing Jerusalem to a vine. 1. It is true, if a vine be fruitful, it is a most valuable tree, none more so; it was one of those that were courted to have dominion over the trees, and the fruit of it is such as cheers God and man (Judg. ix. 12, 13); it makes glad the heart, Ps. civ. 15. So Jerusalem was planted a choice and noble vine, wholly a right seed (Jer. ii. 21); and, if it had brought forth fruit suitable to its character as a holy city, it would have been the glory both of God and Israel. It was a vine which God's right hand had planted, a branch out of a dry ground, which, though its original was mean and despicable, God had made strong for himself (Ps. lxxx. 15), to be to him for a name and for a praise. 2. But, if it be not fruitful, it is good for nothing, it is as worthless and useless a production of the earth as even thorns and briars are: What is the vine-tree, if you take the tree by itself, without consideration of the fruit? What is it more than any tree, that it should have so much care taken of it and so much cost laid out upon it? What is a branch of the vine, though it spread more than a branch which is among the trees of the forest, where it grows neglected and exposed? Or, as some read it, What is the vine more than any tree if the branch of it be as the trees of the forest; that is, if it bear no fruit, as forest-trees seldom do, being designed for timber-trees, not fruit-trees? Now there are some fruit-trees which, if they do not bear, are nevertheless of good use, as the wood of them may be made to turn to a good account; but the vine is not of this sort: if that do not answer its end as a fruit-tree, it is worth nothing as a timber-tree. Observe, I. How this similitude is expressed here. The wild vine, that is among the trees of the forest, or the empty vine (which Israel is compared to, Hos. x. 1), that bears no more fruit than a forest-tree, is good for nothing; it is as useless as a brier, and more so, for that will add some sharpness to the thorny hedge. which the vine-branch will not do.



He shows, 1. That it is fit for no use. The wood of it is not *taken to do any work*; one cannot so much as make a *pin of it to hang a vessel upon*, v. 3. See how variously the gifts of nature are dispensed for the service of man. Among the plants, the roots of some, the seeds or fruits of others, the leaves of others, and of some the stalks, are most serviceable to us; so, among trees, some are strong and not fruitful, as the oaks and cedars; others are weak but very fruitful, as the vine, which is unsightly, low, and depending, yet of great use. Rachel is comely but barren, Leah homely but fruitful. 2. That therefore it is made use of *for fuel*; it will serve to heat the oven with. Because it is not meet for any work, it is cast into the fire, v. 4. When it is good for nothing else it is useful this way, and answers a very needful intention, *for fuel* is a thing we must have, and to burn any thing for fuel which is good for other work is bad husbandry. *To what purpose is this waste?* The unfruitful vine is disposed of in the same way with the briers and thorns, which are rejected, and *whose end is to be burnt*, Heb. vi. 8. And what care is taken of it then? If a piece of solid timber be kindled, somebody perhaps may snatch it as a *brand out of the burning*, and say, "It is a pity to burn it, for it may be put to some better use;" but if the branch of a vine be on fire, and, as usual, both the ends of it and the middle be kindled together, nobody goes about to save it. *When it was whole it was meet for no work, much less when the fire has devoured it* (v. 5); even the ashes of it are not worth saving.

II. How this similitude is applied to Jerusalem. 1. That holy city had become unprofitable and good for nothing. It had been as the *vine-tree among the trees of the vineyard*, abounding in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. When religion flourished there, and the pure worship of God was kept up, many a joyful vintage was then gathered in from it; and, while it continued so, God made a hedge about it; it was his *pleasant plant* (Isa. v. 7); he *watered it every moment and kept it night and day* (Isa. xxvii. 3); but it had now become the *degenerate plant of a strange vine*, of a wild vine (such as we read of 2 Kings iv. 39), a *vine-tree among the trees of the forest*, which, being wild, *brings forth wild grapes* (Isa. v. 4), which are not only of no use, but are nauseous and noxious (Deut. xxxii. 32), *their grapes are grapes of gall, and their clusters are bitter*. It is explained (v. 8): "They have trespassed a trespass, that is, they have treacherously prevaricated with God and perfidiously apostatized from him;" for so the word signifies. Note, Professors of religion, if they do not live up to their profession, but contradict it, if they degenerate and depart from it, are the most unprofitable creatures in the world, like the

salt that has *lost its savour* and is thenceforth good for nothing, Mark ix. 50. Other nations were famed for valour or politics, some for war, others for trade, and retained their credit; but the Jewish nation, being famous as a holy people, when they lost their holiness, and became wicked, were thenceforth good for nothing; with that they lost all their credit and usefulness, and became the most base and despicable people under the sun, *trodden under foot of the Gentiles*. Daniel, and other pious Jews, were of great use in their generation; but the idolatrous Jews then, and the unbelieving Jews now since the preaching of the gospel, have been, and are, of no common service, not fit for any work. 2. Being so, it is given to the fire for fuel, v. 6. Note, Those who are not fruitful to the glory of God's grace will be fuel to the fire of his wrath; and thus, if they give not honour to him, he will get himself honour upon them, honour that will shine brightly in that flaming fire by which impenitent sinners will be for ever consumed. He will not be a loser at last by any of his creatures. *The Lord has made all things for himself*, yea, *even the wicked*, that would not otherwise be for him, *for the day of evil* (Prov. xvi. 4); and in those who would not glorify him as the God to whom duty belongs he will be glorified as the God to whom vengeance belongs. The fire of God's wrath had before devoured both the ends of the Jewish nation (v. 4), Samaria and the cities of Judah; and now Jerusalem, that was the midst of it, was thrown into the fire, to be burnt too, for it is meet for no work; it will not be wrought upon, by any of the methods God has taken, to be serviceable to him. *The inhabitants of Jerusalem* were like a vine-branch, rotten and awkward; and therefore (v. 7), "I will set my face against them, to thwart all their counsels," as they set their faces against God, to contradict his word and defeat all his designs. It is decreed; the consumption is determined: *I will make the land quite desolate*, and therefore, when they go out from one fire, another fire shall devour them (v. 7); the end of one judgment shall be the beginning of another, and their escape from one only a reprieve till another comes; they shall go from misery in their own country to misery in Babylon. Those who kept out of the way of the sword perished by famine or pestilence. When one descent of the Chaldean forces upon them was over, and they thought, *Surely the bitterness of death is past*, yet soon after they returned again with double violence, till they had made a full end. Thus they shall know that I am the Lord, a God of almighty power, when I set my face against them. Note, God shows himself to be the Lord, by perfecting the destruction of his implacable enemies as well as the deliverances of his obedient people. Those against whom God sets his face, though they may come out of one trouble



little hurt, will fall into another; though they come out of the pit, they will be taken in the snare (Isa. xxiv. 18); though they escape the sword of Hazeel, they will fall by that of Jehu (1 Kings xix. 17); for evil pursues sinners. Nay, though they go out from the fire of temporal judgments, and seem to die in peace, yet there is an everlasting fire that will devour them; for, when God judges, first or last he will overcome, and he will be known by the judgments which he executes. See Matt. iii. 10; John xv. 6.

## CHAP. XVI.

Still God is justifying himself in the desolations he is about to bring upon Jerusalem; and very largely, in this chapter, he shows the prophet, and orders him to show the people, that he did but punish them as their sins deserved. In the foregoing chapter he had compared Jerusalem to an unfruitful vine, that was fit for nothing but the fire; in this chapter he compares it to an adulteress, that, in justice, ought to be abandoned and exposed, and has must therefore show the people their abominations, that they might see how little reason they had to complain of the judgments they were under. In this long discourse are set forth, I. The despicable and deplorable beginnings of that church and nation, ver. 3—5. II. The many honours and favours God had bestowed upon them, ver. 6—14. III. Their treacherous and ungrateful departures from him to the services and worship of idols, here represented by the most impudent whoredom, ver. 15—34. IV. A threatening of terrible destroying judgments, which God would bring upon them for this sin, ver. 35—43. V. An aggravation both of their sin and of their punishment, by comparison with Sodom and Samaria, ver. 44—59. VI. A promise of mercy in the close, which God would show to a penitent remnant, ver. 60—63. And this is designed for admonition to us.

**A**GAIN the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, 3 And say, Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite. 4 And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. 5 None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.

Ezekiel is now among the captives in Babylon; but, as Jeremiah at Jerusalem wrote for the use of the captives though they had Ezekiel upon the spot with them (*ch. xxix.*), so Ezekiel wrote for the use of Jerusalem, though Jeremiah himself was resident there; and yet they were far from looking upon it as an affront to one another, or an interference with one another's business; for ministers have need of one another's help both by preaching and writing. Jeremiah wrote to the captives for their consolation, which was the thing they needed; Ezekiel here is directed to write to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their conviction and humiliation, which was the thing they needed.

I. This is his commission (v. 2): "*Cause*

*Jerusalem to know her abominations* (that is, her sins); set them in order before her."

Note, 1. Sins are not only provocations which God is angry at, but *abominations* which he hates, as contrary to his nature, and which we ought to hate, Jer. xlv. 4. 2. The sins of Jerusalem are in a special manner so. The practice of profaneness appears most odious in those that make a profession of religion. 3. Though Jerusalem is a place of great knowledge, yet she is loth to know her abominations; so partial are men in their own favour that they are hardly made to see and own their own badness, but deny it, palliate or extenuate it. 4. It is requisite that we should know our sins, that we may confess them, and may justify God in what he brings upon us for them. 5. It is the work of ministers to cause sinners, sinners in Jerusalem, to know their abominations, to set before them the glass of the law, that in it they may see their own deformities and defilements, to tell them plainly of their faults. *Thou art the man.*

II. That Jerusalem may be made to know her abominations, and particularly the abominable ingratitude she had been guilty of, it was requisite that she should be put in mind of the great things God had done for her, as the aggravations of her bad conduct towards him; and, to magnify those favours, she is in these verses made to know the meanness and baseness of her original, from what poor beginnings God raised her, and how unworthy she was of his favour and of the honour he had put upon her. Jerusalem is here put for the Jewish church and nation, which is here compared to an outcast child, base-born and abandoned, which the mother herself has no affection nor concern for. 1. The extraction of the Jewish nation was mean: "*Thy birth is of the land of Canaan* (v. 3); thou hadst from the very first the spirit and disposition of a Canaanite." The patriarchs dwelt in Canaan, and they were there but *strangers and sojourners*, had no possession, no power, not one foot of ground of their own but a burying-place. Abraham and Sarah were indeed their *father and mother*, but they were only inmates with the Amorites and Hittites, who, having the dominion, seemed to be as parents to the seed of Abraham, witness the court Abraham made to the *children of Heth* (Gen. xxiii. 4, 8), the dependence they had upon their neighbours the Canaanites, and the fear they were in of them, Gen. xiii. 7; xxxiv. 30. If the patriarchs, at their first coming to Canaan, had conquered it, and made themselves masters of it, this would have put an honour upon their family and would have looked great in history; but, instead of that, they *went from one nation to another* (Ps. cv. 13), as tenants from one farm to another, almost as beggars from one door to another, when they were but few in number, yea, very few. And yet this was not the worst;

their fathers had *served other gods in Ur of the Chaldees* (Josh. xxiv. 2); even in Jacob's family there were *strange gods*, Gen. xxxv.

2. Thus early had they a genius leading them to idolatry; and upon this account their ancestors were Amorites and Hittites. 2. When they first began to multiply their condition was really very deplorable, like that of a new-born child, which must of necessity die from the womb if the knees prevent it not, Job iii. 11, 12. The children of Israel, when they began to increase into a people and became considerable, were thrown out from the country that was intended for them; a famine drove them thence. Egypt was *the open field* into which they were cast; there they had no protection or countenance from the government they were under, but, on the contrary, were ruled with rigour, and their lives embittered; they had no encouragement given them to build up their families, no help to build up their estates, no friends or allies to strengthen their interests. Joseph, who had been the *shepherd and stone of Israel*, was dead; the king of Egypt, who should have been kind to them for Joseph's sake, set himself to *destroy this man-child as soon as it was born* (Rev. xii. 4), ordered all the males to be slain, which, it is likely, occasioned the exposing of many as well as Moses, to which perhaps the similitude here has reference. The founders of nations and cities had occasion for all the arts and arms they were masters of, set their heads on work, by policies and stratagems, to preserve and nurse up their infant states. *Tantæ molis erat Romanam condere gentem*—So vast were the efforts requisite to the establishment of the Roman name. Virgil. But the nation of Israel had no such care taken of it, no such pains taken with it, as Athens, Sparta, Rome, and other commonwealths had when they were first founded, but, on the contrary, was doomed to destruction, like an infant new-born, exposed to wind and weather, *the navel-string not cut*, the poor babe *not washed*, not clothed, *not swaddled*, because not pitied, v. 4, 5. Note, We owe the preservation of our infant lives to the natural pity and compassion which the God of nature has put into the hearts of parents and nurses towards new-born children. This infant is said to be *cast out, to the loathing of her person*; it was a sign that she was loathed by those that bore her, and she appeared loathsome to all that looked upon her. *The Israelites were an abomination to the Egyptians*, as we find Gen. xliii. 32; xli. 34. Some think that this refers to the corrupt and vicious disposition of that people from their beginning: they were not only the weakest and *fewest of all people* (Deut. vii. 7), but the worst and most ill-humoured of all people. *God giveth thee this good land, not for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiff-necked people*, Deut. ix. 6. And Moses tells them there (v. 24), *You have been rebellious*

*against the Lord from the day that I knew you. They were not supplied, nor washed, nor swaddled; they were not at all tractable or manageable, nor cast into any good shape. God took them to be his people, not because he saw any thing in them inviting or promising, but so it seemed good in his sight. And it is a very apt illustration of the miserable condition of all the children of men by nature. As for our nativity, in the day that we were born we were shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, our understandings darkened, our minds alienated from the life of God, polluted with sin, which rendered us loathsome in the eyes of God. Marvel not then that we are told, You must be born again.*

6 And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live. 7 I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare. 8 Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. 9 Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. 10 I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. 11 I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. 12 And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and ear-rings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. 13 Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment *was* of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. 14 And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it *was* perfect through my



comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.

In these verses we have an account of the great things which God did for the Jewish nation in raising them up by degrees to be very considerable. 1. God saved them from the ruin they were upon the brink of in Egypt (v. 6): "*When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy own blood, loathed and abandoned, and appointed to die, as sheep for the slaughter, then I said unto thee, Live. I designed thee for life when thou wast doomed to destruction, and resolved to save thee from death.*" Those shall live to whom God commands life. God looked upon the world of mankind as thus cast off, thus cast out, thus polluted, thus weltering in blood, and his thoughts towards it were thoughts of good, designing it life, and that more abundantly. By converting grace, he says to the soul, *Live*. 2. He looked upon them with kindness and a tender affection, not only pitied them, but *set his love upon them*, which was unaccountable, for there was nothing lovely in them; but *I looked upon thee, and, behold, thy time was the time of love*, v. 8. It was the kindness and love of God our Saviour that sent Christ to redeem us, that sends the Spirit to sanctify us, that brought us out of a state of nature into a state of grace. That was a time of love indeed, distinguishing love, when God manifested his love to us, and courted our love to him. *Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour*, Cant. viii. 10. 3. He took them under his protection: "*I spread my skirt over thee, to shelter thee from wind and weather, and to cover thy nakedness, that the shame of it might not appear.*" Boaz spread his skirt over Ruth, in token of the special favour he designed her, Ruth iii. 9. God took them into his care, as an eagle bears her young ones upon her wings, Deut. xxxii. 11, 12. When God owned them for his people, and sent Moses to Egypt to deliver them, which was an expression of the good-will of him that dwelt in the bush, then he spread his skirt over them. 4. He cleared them from the reproachful character which their bondage in Egypt laid them under (v. 9): "*Then washed I thee with water, to make thee clean, and anointed thee with oil, to make thee sweet and supple thee.*" All the disgrace of their slavery was rolled away when they were brought, with a high hand and a stretched-out arm, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. When God said, *Israel is my son, my first-born—Let my people go, that they may serve me*, that word, backed as it was with so many works of wonder, thoroughly washed away their blood; and when God led them under the convoy of the pillar of cloud and fire he spread his skirt over them. 5. He multiplied them and built them up into a people. This is here mentioned (v. 7) before his spreading

his skirt over them, because their numbers increased exceedingly while they were yet bond-slaves in Egypt. They multiplied as the bud of the field in spring time; they waxed great, exceedingly mighty, Exod. i. 7, 20. Their breasts were fashioned when they were formed into distinct tribes and had officers of their own (Exod. v. 19); their hair grew when they grew numerous, whereas they had been naked and bare, very few and therefore contemptible. 6. He admitted them into covenant with himself. See what glorious nuptials this poor forlorn infant is preferred to at last. How she is dignified who at first had scarcely her life given her for a prey: *I swore unto thee and entered into covenant with thee*. This was done at Mount Sinai; "when the covenant between God and Israel was sealed and ratified then thou becamest mine." God called them his people, and himself the God of Israel. Note, Those to whom God gives spiritual life he takes into covenant with himself; by that covenant they become his subjects and servants, which intimates their duty—his portion, his treasure, which intimates their privilege; and it is confirmed with an oath, *that we might have strong consolation*. 7. He beautified and adorned them. This maid cannot forget her ornaments, and she is gratified with abundance of them, v. 10—13. We need not be particular in the application of these. Her wardrobe was well furnished with rich apparel; they had embroidered work to wear, shoes of fine badgers' skins, linen girdles, and silk veils, bracelets and necklaces, jewels and ear-rings, and even a beautiful crown, or coronet. Perhaps this may refer to the jewels and other rich goods which they took from the Egyptians, which might well be spoken of thus long after as a merciful circumstance of their deliverance, when it was spoken of long before, Gen. xv. 14. *They shall come out with great substance*. Or it may be taken figuratively for all those blessings of heaven which adorned both their church and state. In a little time they came to excellent ornaments, v. 7. The laws and ordinances which God gave them were to them as ornaments of grace to the head and chains about the neck, Prov. i. 9. God's sanctuary, which he set up among them, was a beautiful crown upon their head; it was the beauty of holiness. 8. He fed them with abundance, with plenty, with dainty: *Thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil—manna, angels' food—honey out of the rock, oil out of the flinty rock*. In Canaan they did eat bread to the full, the finest of the wheat, Deut. xxxii. 13, 14. Those whom God takes into covenant with himself are fed with the bread of life, clothed with the robe of righteousness, adorned with the graces and comforts of the spirit. The hidden man of the heart is that which is incorruptible. 9. He gave them great reputation among their neighbours, and made them considerable,



acceptable to their friends and allies and formidable to their adversaries: *Thou didst prosper into a kingdom* (v. 13), which speaks both dignity and dominion; and, *Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty*, v. 14. The nations about had their eye upon them, and admired them for the excellent laws by which they were governed, the privilege they had of access to God, Deut. iv. 7, 8. Solomon's wisdom, and Solomon's temple, were very much *the renown* of that nation; and, if we put all the privileges of the Jewish church and kingdom together, we must own that it was the most accomplished beauty of all the nations of the earth. The beauty of it was perfect; you could not name the thing that would be the honour of a people but it was to be found in Israel, in David's and Solomon's time, when that kingdom was in its zenith—piety, learning, wisdom, justice, victory, peace, wealth, and all sure to continue if they had kept close to God. *It was perfect, saith God, through my comeliness which I had put upon thee*, through the beauty of their holiness, as they were a people set apart for God, and devoted to him, to be to him *for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory*. It was this that put a lustre upon all their other honours and was indeed the perfection of their beauty. We may apply this spiritually. Sanctified souls are truly beautiful; they are so in God's sight, and they themselves may take the comfort of it. But God must have all the glory, for they were by nature deformed and polluted, and, whatever comeliness they have, it is that which God has put upon them and beautified them with, and he will be well pleased with the work of his own hands.

15 But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. 16 And of thy garments thou didst take, and deckedst thy high places with divers colours, and playedst the harlot thereupon: *the like things* shall not come, neither shall it be so. 17 Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, 18 And tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. 19 My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, *wherewith* I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and *thus* it was, saith the

Lord God. 20 Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. *Is this* of thy whoredoms a small matter, 21 That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through *the fire* for them? 22 And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, *and* wast polluted in thy blood. 23 And it came to pass after all thy wickedness, (Woe, woe unto thee! saith the Lord God;) 24 *That* thou hast also built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee a high place in every street. 25 Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. 26 Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger. 27 Behold, therefore I have stretched out my hand over thee, and have diminished thine ordinary *food*, and delivered thee unto the will of them that hate thee, the daughters of the Philistines, which are ashamed of thy lewd way. 28 Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. 29 Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. 30 How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these *things*, the work of an impetuous whorish woman; 31 In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as a harlot, in that thou scornest hire; 32 *But as a wife* that committeth adultery, *which* taketh strangers instead of her husband! 33 They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers,



and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom. 34 And the contrary is in thee from *other* women in thy whoredoms, whereas none followeth thee to commit whoredoms: and in that thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee, therefore thou art contrary.

In these verses we have an account of the great wickedness of the people of Israel, especially in worshipping idols, notwithstanding the great favours that God had conferred upon them, by which, one would think, they should have been for ever engaged to him. This wickedness of theirs is here represented by the lewd and scandalous conversation of that beautiful maid which was rescued from ruin, brought up and well provided for by a kind friend and benefactor, that had been in all respects as a father and a husband to her. Their idolatry was the great provoking sin that they were guilty of; it began in the latter end of Solomon's time (for from Samuel's till then I do not remember that we read any thing of it), and thenceforward continued more or less the crying sin of that nation till the captivity; and, though it now and then met with some check from the reforming kings, yet it was never totally suppressed, and for the most part appeared to a high degree impudent and barefaced. They not only worshipped the true God by images, as the ten tribes by the calves at Dan and Bethel, but they worshipped false gods, Baal and Moloch, and all the senseless rabble of the pagan deities.

This is that which is here all along represented (as often elsewhere) under the similitude of whoredom and adultery. 1. Because it is the violation of a marriage-covenant with God, forsaking him and embracing the bosom of a stranger; it is giving that affection and that service to his rivals which are due to him alone. 2. Because it is the corrupting and defiling of the mind, and the enslaving of the spiritual part of the man, and subjecting it to the power and dominion of sense, as whoredom is. 3. Because it debauches the conscience, sears and hardens it; and those who by their idolatries dishonour the divine nature, and change the truth of God into a lie and his glory into shame, God justly punishes by giving them over to a reprobate mind, to dishonour the human nature with vile affections, Rom. i. 23, &c. It is a besotting bewitching sin; and, when men are given up to it, they seldom recover themselves out of the snare. 4. Because it is a shameful scandalous sin for those that have joined themselves to the Lord to join themselves to an idol. Now observe here,

I. What were the causes of this sin. How

came the people of God to be drawn away to the service of idols? How came a virgin so well taught, so well educated, to be debauched? Who would have thought it? But, 1. They grew proud (v. 15): *Thou trustedst to thy beauty*, and didst expect that that should make thee an interest, and didst *play the harlot because of thy renown*." They thought, because they were so complimented and admired by their neighbours, that, further to ingratiate themselves with them and return their compliments, they must join with them in their worship and conform to their usages. Solomon admitted idolatry, to gratify his wives and their relations. Note, Abundance of young people are ruined by pride and particularly pride in their beauty. *Rara est concordia formæ atque pudicitia*—Beauty and chastity are seldom associated. 2. They forgot their beginning (v. 22): *"Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth*, how poor, and mean, and despicable thou wast, and what great things God did for thee and what lasting obligations he laid upon thee thereby." Note, It would be an effectual check to our pride and sensuality to consider what we are and how much we are beholden to the free grace of God. 3. They were weak in understanding and in resolution (v. 30): *How weak is thy heart, seeing thou dost all these things*. Note, The strength of men's lusts is an evidence of the weakness of their hearts; they have no acquaintance with themselves, nor government of themselves. She is weak, and yet an imperious whorish woman. Note, Those that are most foolish are commonly most imperious, and think themselves fit to manage others when they are far from being able to manage themselves.

II. What were the particulars of it. 1. They worshipped all the idols that came in their way, all that they were ever courted to the worship of; they were at the beck of all their neighbours (v. 15): *Thou pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was*. They were ready to close with every temptation of this kind, though ever so absurd. No foreign idol could be imported, no new god invented, but they were ready to catch at it, as a common strumpet that prostitutes herself to all comers and *multiplies her whoredoms*, v. 25. Thus some common drunkards will be company for every one that puts up the finger to them; how weak are the hearts of such! 2. They adorned their idol-temples, and groves, and high places, with the fine rich clothing that God had given them (v. 16, 18): *Thou deckedst thy high places with divers colours*, with the coats of divers colours, like Joseph's, which God had given them as particular marks of his favour, and *hast played the harlot* (that is, worshipped idols) *thereupon*. Of this he saith, *"The like things shall not come, neither shall it be so; that is, this is a thing by no means to be suffered; I will never endure such practices as*

these without showing my resentments." 3. They made images for worship of the jewels which God had given them (v. 17): *The jewels of my gold and my silver which I had given thee.* Note, It is God that gives us our gold and silver; the products of trade, of art and industry, are the gifts of God's providence to us, as well as the fruits of the earth. And what God gives us the use of he still retains a property in. It is *my silver and my gold*, though I have *given it to thee.*" It is his still, so that we ought to serve and honour him with it, and are accountable to him for the disposal of it. Every penny has God's image upon it as well as Cæsar's. Should we make our silver and gold, our plate, money, and jewels, the matter of our pride and contention, our covetousness and prodigality, if we duly considered that they were God's silver and his gold? The Israelites began betimes to turn their jewels into idols, when Aaron made the golden calf of their earrings. 4. They served their idols with the good things which God gave them for their own use and to serve him with (v. 18): "*Thou hast set my oil and my incense before them*, upon their altars, as perfumes to these dunghill-deities; *my meat, and fine flour, and oil*, and that honey which Canaan flowed with, and *wherewith I fed thee*, thou hast regaled them and their hungry priests with, hast made an offering of it to them for a *sweet savour*, to purify them, and procure acceptance with them: and *thus it was*, saith the Lord God; it is too plain to be denied, too bad to be excused. *These things thou hast done.* He that knows all things knows it." See how fond they were of their idols, that they would part with that which was given them for the necessary subsistence of themselves and their families to honour them with, which may shame our niggardliness and strait-handedness in the service of the true and living God. 5. They had sacrificed their children to their idols. This is insisted upon here, and often elsewhere, as one of the worst instances of their idolatry, as indeed there was none in which the devil triumphed so much over the children of men, both their natural reason and their natural affection, as in this (see Jer. vii. 31; xix. 5; xxxii. 35): *Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters*, and not only made them to pass through the fire, or between two fires, in token of their being dedicated to Moloch, but thou hast *sacrificed them to be devoured*, v. 20. Never was there such an instance of the degenerating of the paternal authority into the most barbarous tyranny as this was. Yet that was not the worst of it: it was an irreparable wrong to God himself, who challenged a special property in their children more than in their gold and silver and their meat: They are *my children* (v. 21), the *sons and daughters which thou hast borne unto me*, v. 20. He is the *Father of spirits*, and rational souls are in a particular manner his; and therefore the taking away of life, human

life, unjustly, is a high affront to the *God of life.* But the children of Israelites were his by a further right; they were the *children of the covenant*, born in God's house. He had said to Abraham, *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed*; they had the seal of the covenant in their flesh from eight days old; they were to bear God's name, and keep up his church; to murder them was in the highest degree inhuman, but to murder them in honour of an idol was in the highest degree impious. One cannot think of it without the utmost indignation: to see the pitiless hands of the parents shedding the guiltless blood of their own children, and by offering those pieces of themselves to the devil for dying sacrifices openly avowing the offering up of themselves to him for living sacrifices! How absurd was this, that the children which were born to God should be *sacrificed to devils!* Note, The children of parents that are members of the visible church are to be looked upon as born unto God, and his children; as such, and under that character, we are to love them, and pray for them, bring them up for him, and, if he calls for them, cheerfully part with them to him; for *may he not do what he will with his own?* Upon this instance of their idolatry, which indeed ought not to pass without a particular brand, this remark is made (v. 20), *Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter?* which intimates that there were those who made a small matter of it, and turned it into a jest. Note, There is no sin so heinous, so apparently heinous, which men of prodigate consciences will not make a mock at. But is whoredom, is spiritual whoredom, a small matter? Is it a small matter for men to make their children brutes and the devil their god? It will be a great matter shortly. 6. They built temples in honour of their idols, that others might be invited to resort thither and join with them in the worship of their idols: "*After all thy wickedness of this kind committed in private*, for which, *woe, woe, unto thee*" (that comes in in a sad parenthesis, denoting those to be in a woeful condition who are going on in sin, and giving them warning in time, if they would but take it), "*thou hast at length arrived at such a pitch of impudence as to proclaim it; thou hast long had a whore's heart, but now thou hast come to have a whore's forehead, and canst not blush,*" v. 23—25. *Thou hast built there an eminent place, a brothel-house* (so the margin reads it), and such their idol temples were. *Thou hast made for thyself a high place*, for one idol or other, *in every street, and at every head of the way*; and again v. 31. They did all they could to seduce and debauch others, and to spread the contagion, by making the temptations to idolatry as strong as possibly they could; and hereby the ringleaders in idolatry did but *make themselves vile*, and even those that had courted them to it, finding themselves outdone by them, began to be surfeited with



the abundance and violence of their idolatries: *Thou hast made thy beauty to be abhorred*, even by those that had admired it. The Jewish nation, by leaving their own God, and doting on the gods of the nations round about them, had made themselves mean and despicable in the eyes even of their heathen neighbours; much more was their *beauty abhorred* by all that were wise and good, and had any concern for the honour of God and religion. Note, Those shame themselves that bring a reproach on their profession. And justly will that beauty, that excellency, at length be made the object of the loathing of others which men have made the matter of their own pride.

III. What were the aggravations of this sin.

1. They were fond of the idols of those nations which had been their oppressors and persecutors. As, (1.) The Egyptians. They were a people notorious for idolatry, and for the most sottish senseless idolatries; they had of old abused Israel by their barbarous dealings, and of late by their treacherous dealings—were always either cruel or false to them; and yet so infatuated were they that *they committed fornication with the Egyptians their neighbours*, not only by joining with them in their idolatries, but by entering into leagues and alliances with them, and depending upon them for help in their straits, which was an adulterous departure from God. (2.) The Assyrians. They had also been vexations to Israel: “And yet *thou hast played the whore with them* (v. 28); though they lived at a greater distance, yet thou hast entertained their idols and their superstitious usages, and so *hast multiplied thy fornications unto Chaldea*, hast borrowed images of gods, patterns of altars, rites of sacrificing, and one foolery or other of that kind, from that remote country, that enemy’s country, and hast imported them *into the land of Canaan*, enfranchised and established them there.” Thus Mr. George Herbert long since foretold, or feared at least,

That Seine shall swallow Tiber, and the Thames  
By letting in them both pollute her streams.

2. They had been under the rebukes of Providence for their sins, and yet they persisted in them (v. 27): *I have stretched out my hand over thee*, to threaten and frighten thee. So God did before he *laid his hand upon them* to ruin and destroy them; and that is his usual method, to try to bring men to repentance first by less judgments. He did so here. Before he brought such a famine upon them as broke the staff of bread he *diminished their ordinary food*, cut them short before he cut them off. When the overplus is abused, it is just with God to diminish that which is for necessity. Before he delivered them to the Chaldeans to be destroyed he delivered them *to the daughters of the Philistines* to be ridiculed for their

idolatries; for they hated them, and, though they were idolaters themselves, yet were ashamed of the lewd way of the Israelites, who had grown more profane in their idolatries than any of their neighbours, who changed their gods, whereas other nations did not change theirs, Jer. ii. 10, 11. For this they were justly chastised by the Philistines. Or it may refer to the inroads which the Philistines made upon the south of Judah in the reign of Ahaz, by which it was weakened and impoverished, and which was the beginning of sorrows to them (2 Chron. xxviii. 18); but they did not take warning by those judgments, and therefore were justly abandoned to ruin at last. Note, In the account which impenitent sinners shall be called to they will be told not only of the mercies for which they have been ungrateful, but of the afflictions under which they have been incorrigible, Amos iv. 11.

3. They were insatiable in their spiritual whoredom: *Thou couldst not be satisfied*, v. 28 and again v. 29. When they had multiplied their idols and superstitious usages beyond measure, yet still they were enquiring after new gods and new fashions in worship. Those that in sincerity join themselves to the true God find enough in him for their satisfaction; and, though they still desire more of God, yet they never desire more than God. But those that forsake this living fountain for broken cisterns will find themselves soon surfeited, but never satisfied; they have soon enough of the gods they have, and are still enquiring after more.

4. They were at great expense with their idolatry, and laid out a great deal of wealth in purchasing patterns of images and altars, and hiring priests to attend upon them from other countries. Harlots generally had their hire; but this impudent adulteress, instead of being hired to serve idols, hired idols to protect her and accept her homage. This is much insisted on, v. 31—34. “In this respect *the contrary is in thee from other women in thy whoredoms*: others are courted, but thou makest court to those that do not follow thee, art fond of making leagues and alliances with those heathen nations that despise thee; others have gifts given them, but thou givest thy gifts, the gifts which God had graciously given thee, to thy idols; herein thou art like a wife that commits adultery, not for gain, as harlots do, but entirely for the sin’s sake.” Note, Spiritual lusts, those of the mind, such as theirs after idols were, are often as strong and impetuous as any carnal lusts are. And it is a great aggravation of sin when men are their own tempters, and, instead of proposing to themselves any worldly advantage by their sin, are at great expense with it; such are *transgressors without cause* (Ps. xxv. 3), wicked transgressors indeed.

And now is not Jerusalem in all this made to know her abominations? For what

greater abominations could she be guilty of than these? Here we may see with wonder and horror what the corrupt nature of men is when God leaves them to themselves, yea, though they have the greatest advantages to be better and do better. And the way of sin is down-hill. *Nitimur in vetitum—We incline to what is forbidden.*

35 Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: 36 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; 37 Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all *them* that thou hast loved, with all *them* that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. 38 And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. 39 And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. 40 They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. 41 And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. 42 So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry. 43 Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast fretted me in all these *things*; behold, therefore I also will recompense thy way upon *thine* head, saith the Lord GOD: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations.

Adultery was by the law of Moses made a capital crime. This notorious adulteress,

the criminal at the bar, being in the foregoing verses found guilty, here has sentence passed upon her. It is ushered in with solemnity, *v. 35*. The prophet, as the judge, in God's name calls to her, *O harlot! hear the word of the Lord*. Our Saviour preached to harlots, for their conversion, to bring them into the kingdom of God, not as the prophet here, to expel them out of it. Note, An apostate church is a harlot. Jerusalem is so if she become idolatrous. *How has the faithful city become a harlot!* Rome is so represented in the Revelation, when it is marked for ruin, as Jerusalem here. Rev. xvii. 1, *Come, and I will show thee the judgments of the great whore*. Those who will not hear the commanding word of the Lord and obey it shall be made to hear the condemning word of the Lord and shall tremble at it. Let us attend while judgment is given.

I. The crime is stated and the articles of the charge are summed up (*v. 36*) and (as is usual) with the attendant aggravations (*v. 43*); for when God speaks in wrath he will be justified, and clear when he judges, clear when he is judged; and sinners, when they are condemned, shall have their sins so set in order before them that their mouth shall be stopped and they shall not have a word to object against the equity of the sentence. The crimes which this harlot stands convicted of, and is now to be condemned for, are, 1. The violation of the first two commandments of the first table by idolatry, which is here called her *whoredoms with her lovers* (so she called them, Hos. ii. 12, because she loved them as if they had been indeed her benefactors), that is, with *all the idols of her abominations*, the abominable idols which she served and worshipped. 'This was the sin which provoked God to jealousy. 2. The violation of the first two commandments of the second table by the murder of their own innocent infants: *The blood of thy children which thou didst give unto them*. It is not strange if those that have cast off God and his fear break through the strongest and most sacred bonds of natural affection. Their sins are aggravated from the consideration, (1.) Of the dishonour they had thereby done to themselves: "*Hereby thy filthiness was poured out; the uncleanness that was in thy heart was hereby discovered and brought to light, and thy nakedness was exposed to view, and thou wast thereby exposed to contempt.*" God is displeased with his professing people for shaming themselves by their sins. (2.) Their base ingratitude is another aggravation of their sins: "*Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, and the kindness that was done thee then, when otherwise thou wouldst have perished,*" *v. 43*. And, (3.) The vexation which their sins gave to God, whom they ought to have pleased: "*Thou hast fretted me in all these things,*



not only angered me, but grieved me." It is a strange expression, and, one would think, enough to melt a heart of stone, that the great God, who cannot admit any uneasiness, is pleased to speak of the sins and follies of his professing people as *fretting* to him. *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation.*

II. The sentence is passed in general: *I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged* (v. 38), and those two crimes were punished with death, with an ignominious death. "Thou hast shed blood, and therefore I will give thee blood; thou hast broken wedlock, and therefore I will give it thee, not only in justice, but in jealousy, not only as a righteous Judge, but as an injured and incensed husband, who will not spare in the day of vengeance," Prov. vi. 34, 35. He will recompense their way upon their head, v. 43. In all the judgments God executes upon sinners we must see *their own way recompensed upon their head*; they are dealt with not only as they deserved, but as they procured. It is the end which their sin, as a way, had a direct tendency to. More particularly, 1. This criminal must be (as is usually done with criminals) exposed to public shame, v. 37. Malefactors are not executed privately, but are made a spectacle to the world. Care is here taken to bring spectators together: *All those whom thou hast loved, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, shall come to be witnesses of the execution, that they may take warning and prevent their own like ruin; and those also whom thou hast hated, who will insult over thee and triumph in thy fall.*" Both ways the calamities of Jerusalem will be aggravated, that they will be the grief of her friends and the joy of her foes. These shall not only be gathered around her, but gathered against her; even those with whom she took unlawful pleasure, with whom she contracted unlawful leagues, the Egyptians and Assyrians, shall now contribute to her ruin. As, when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, so when a man's ways displease the Lord he makes even his friends to be at war with him; and justly makes those a scourge and a plague to sinners, and instruments of their destruction, who were their tempters, and with whom they were partakers in wickedness. Those whom they have suffered to strip them of their virtue shall see them stripped, and perhaps help to strip them, of all their other ornaments; to see the nakedness of the land will they come. It is added, to the same purport (v. 41), *I will execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women; thou shalt be made an example of in terrorem—that others may see and fear and do no more presumptuously.* 2. The criminal is condemned to die, for her sins are such as death is the wages of (v. 40): *They shall*

*bring up a company* (that is, a company shall be brought up) *against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords*; so great a death, so many deaths in one, is this adulteress adjudged to. When the walls of Jerusalem were battered down with stones shot against them, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were put to the sword, then this sentence was executed in the letter of it. 3. The estate of the criminal is confiscated, and all that belonged to her destroyed with her (v. 39): *They shall throw down thy eminent place, and (v. 41) they shall burn thy houses*, as the habitations of bad women are destroyed, in detestation of their lewdness. Their high places, erected in honour of their idols, by which they thought to ingratiate themselves with their neighbours, shall be an offence to them, and even they shall break them down. It was long the complaint, even in some of the best reigns of the kings of Judah, that *the high places were not taken away*; but now the army of the Chaldeans, when they lay all waste, shall break them down. If iniquity be not taken away by the justice of the nation, it shall be taken away by the judgments of God upon the nation. 4. Thus both the sin and the sinners shall be abolished together, and an end put to both: *Thou shalt cease from playing the harlot*; there shall be no remainders of idolatry in the land, because the inhabitants shall be wholly extirpated, and they shall give no more hire because they shall have no more to give. Some that will not leave their sins live till their sins leave them. When all that with which they honoured their idols is taken from them they shall not give hire any more (v. 41): "Then thou shalt not commit this lewdness of sacrificing thy children, which was a crime provoking above all thy abominations, for thy children shall all be cut off by the sword or carried into captivity, so that thou shalt have none to sacrifice," v. 43. Or it may be meant of the reformation of those of them that escape and survive the punishment; they shall take warning, and shall do no more presumptuously. The captivity in Babylon made the people of Israel to cease for ever from playing the harlot; it effectually cured them of their inclination to idolatry. And then all shall be well, when this is the fruit, even the taking away of sin; then (v. 42) *my jealousy shall depart. I will be quiet, and no more angry.* When we begin to be at war with sin God will be at peace with us; for he continues the affliction no longer than till it has done its work. When sin departs God's jealousy will soon depart, for he is never jealous but when we give him just cause to be so. Yet some understand this as a threatening of utter ruin, that God will make a full end and the fire of his anger shall burn as long as there is any fuel for it. *His fury shall rest upon them, and not*

remove. Compare this with that doom of unbelievers, John iii. 36. *The wrath of God abideth on them.* They shall drink the dregs of the cup, and then God will be *no more angry*, for he is *eased of his adversaries* (Isa. i. 24), is satisfied in the abandoning of them, and therefore will be *no more angry*, because there are no more for his anger to fasten upon. They had fretted him, when judgment and mercy were contesting; but now *he is quiet*, as he will be in the eternal damnation of sinners, wherein he will be glorified, and therefore he will be satisfied.

44 Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use *this* proverb against thee, saying, As *is* the mother, *so is* her daughter. 45 Thou *art* thy mother's daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children; and thou *art* the sister of thy sisters, which loathed their husbands and their children: your mother *was* a Hittite, and your father *an* Amorite. 46 And thine elder sister *is* Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, *is* Sodom and her daughters. 47 Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as *if that were* a very little *thing*, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. 48 *As* I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. 49 Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. 50 And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw *good*. 51 Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. 52 Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they: they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast

justified thy sisters. 53 When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then *will I bring again* the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them: 54 That thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be confounded in all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them. 55 When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate. 56 For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy pride, 57 Before thy wickedness was discovered, as at the time of *thy* reproach of the daughters of Syria, and all *that are* round about her, the daughters of the Philistines, which despise thee round about. 58 Thou hast borne thy lewdness and thine abominations, saith the Lord. 59 For thus saith the Lord God; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant.

The prophet here further shows Jerusalem her abominations, by comparing her with those places that had gone before her, and showing that she was worse than any of them, and therefore should, like them, be utterly and irreparably ruined. We are all apt to judge of ourselves by comparison, and to imagine that we are sufficiently good if we are but as good as such and such, who are thought passable; or that we are not dangerously bad if we are no worse than such and such, who, though bad, are not of the worst. Now God by the prophet shows Jerusalem,

I. That she was as bad as *her mother*, that is, as the accursed devoted Canaanites that were the possessors of this land before her. Those that use proverbs, as most people do, shall apply that proverb to Jerusalem, *As is the mother, so is her daughter*, v. 44. She is *her mother's own child*. The Jews are as like the Canaanites in temper and inclination as if they had been their own children. The character of the mother was that she *loathed her husband and her children*, she had all the marks of an adulteress; and that is the character of the daughter: she *forsakes the guide of her youth*, and is barbarous to the children of her own bowels. When God brought Israel into Canaan he particularly warned them not to do according to the abominations



of the men of that land, who went before them (for which it had sped them out, Lev. xviii. 27, 28), the monuments of whose idolatry, with the remains of the idolaters themselves, would be a continual temptation to them; but they learned their way, and trod in their steps, and were as well affected to the idols of Canaan as ever they were (Ps. cvi. 38), and thus, in respect of imitation, it might truly be said that their mother was a Hittite and their father an Amorite (v. 45), for they resembled them more than Abraham and Sarah.

II. That she was worse than her sisters Sodom and Samaria, that were adulteresses too, that loathed their husbands and their children, that were weary of the gods of their fathers, and were for introducing new gods, *à-la-mode*—quite in style, that came newly up, and new fashions in religion, and were given to change. On this comparison between Jerusalem and her sisters the prophet here enlarges, that he might either shame them into repentance or justify God in their ruin. Observe,

1. Who Jerusalem's sisters were, v. 45. Samaria and Sodom. Samaria is called the elder sister, or rather the greater, because it was a much larger city and kingdom, richer and more considerable, and more nearly allied to Israel. If Jerusalem look northward, this is partly on her left hand. This city of Samaria, and the towns and villages, that were as daughters to that mother-city, these had been lately destroyed for their spiritual whoredom. Sodom, and the adjacent towns and villages that were her daughters, dwelt at Jerusalem's right hand, and was her less sister, less than Jerusalem, less than Samaria, and these were of old destroyed for their corporeal whoredom, Jude 7.

2. Wherein Jerusalem's sins resembled her sisters', particularly Sodom's (v. 49): *This was the iniquity of Sodom* (it is implied, and this is thy iniquity too), *pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness*. Their going after strange flesh, which was Sodom's most flagrant wickedness, is not mentioned, because notoriously known, but those sins which did not look so black, but opened the door and led the way to these more enormous crimes, and began to fill that measure of her sins, which was filled up at length by their unnatural filthiness. Now these initiating sins were, (1.) Pride, in which the heart lifts up itself above and against both God and man. Pride was the first sin that turned angels into devils, and the garden of the Lord into a hell upon earth. It was the pride of the Sodomites that they despised righteous Lot, and would not bear to be reproved by him; and this ripened them for ruin. (2.) Gluttony, here called *fulness of bread*. It was God's great mercy that they had plenty, but their great sin that they abused it, glutted themselves with it, ate to excess and drank to excess, and made that

the gratification of their lusts which was given them to be the support of their lives. (3.) Idleness, *abundance of idleness*, a dread of labour and a love of ease. Their country was fruitful, and the abundance they had they came easily by, which was a temptation to them to indulge themselves in sloth, which disposed them to all that abominable filthiness which kindled their flames. Note, Idleness is an inlet to much sin. The men of Sodom, who were idle, were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly, Gen. xiii. 13. The standing waters gather filth and the sitting bird is the fowler's mark. When David arose from off his bed at evening he saw Bathsheba. *Quæritur, Agisthus quare sit factus adulter? In promptu causa est; desidiosus erat—What made Agisthus an adulterer? Indolence.* (4.) Oppression: Neither did she strengthen the hands of the poor and needy; probably it is implied that she weakened their hands and broke their arms; however, it was bad enough that, when she had so much wealth, and consequently power and interest and leisure, she did nothing for the relief of the poor, in providing for those wants those that themselves are full of bread may employ their time well; they need not be so abundantly idle as too often they are. These were the sins of the Sodomites, and these were Jerusalem's sins. Their pride, the cause of their sins, is mentioned again (v. 50): *They were haughty*, with the horrid effects of their sins, their abominations which they committed before God. Men arrive gradually at the height of impiety and wickedness. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus—No man reaches the height of vice at once.* But, where pride has got the ascendant in a man, he is in the high road to all abominations.

3. How much the sins of Jerusalem exceeded those of Sodom and Samaria; they were more heinous in the sight of God, either in themselves or by reason of several aggravations: *"Thou hast not only walked after their ways, and trod in their steps, but hast quite outdone them in wickedness, v. 47. Thou thoughtest it a very little thing to do as they did; didst laugh at them as sneaking sinners and silly ones; thou wouldst be more cunning, more daring, in wickedness, wouldst triumph more boldly over thy convictions, and bid more open defiance to God and religion: 'if a man will break, let him break for something.' Thus thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways."* Jerusalem was more polite, and therefore sinned with more wit, more art and ingenuity, than Sodom and Samaria could. Jerusalem had more wealth and power, and its government was more absolute and arbitrary, and therefore had the more opportunity of oppressing the poor, and shedding malignant influences around her, than Sodom and Samaria had. Jerusalem had the temple, and the ark, and the priesthood, and kings of the house of

David; and therefore the wickedness of that holy city, that was so dignified, so near, so dear to God, was more provoking to him than the wickedness of Sodom and Samaria, that had not Jerusalem's privileges and means of grace. Sodom has *not done as thou hast done*, v. 48. This agrees with what Christ says. Matt. xi. 24, *It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee*. The kingdom of the ten tribes had been very wicked; and yet Samaria has *not committed half thy sins* (v. 51), has not worshipped half so many idols, nor slain half so many prophets. It was bad enough that those of Jerusalem were guilty of Sodom's sins, Sodomy itself not excepted, 1 Kings xiv. 24; 2 Kings xxiii. 7. And though the Dead Sea, the standing monument of Sodom's sin and ruin, bordered upon their country (Num. xxxiv. 12), and that sulphureous lake was always under their nose (God having *taken away Sodom and her daughters* in such way and manner as he *saw good*, as he says here, v. 50, so as that one thing should effectually make their overthrow an ensample to those that afterwards should *live ungodly*, 2 Pet. ii. 6), yet they did not take warning, but *multiplied their abominations more than they*; and, (1.) By this they *justified Sodom and Samaria*, v. 51. They pretended, in their haughtiness and superciliousness, to *judge them*, and in the days of old, when they retained their integrity, they did judge them, v. 52. But now they justify them comparatively: *Sodom and Samaria are more righteous than thou*, that is, less wicked. It will look like some extenuation of their sins that, bad as they were, Jerusalem was worse, though it was God's own city. Not that it will serve for a plea to justify Sodom, but it condemns Jerusalem, against which Sodom and Samaria will *rise up in judgment*. (2.) For this they ought themselves to be greatly ashamed: "Thou who hast *judged thy sisters*, and cried out shame on them, now *bear thy own shame, for thy sins which thou hast committed*, which, though of the same kind with theirs, yet, being committed *by thee*, are *more abominable than theirs*," v. 52. This may be taken either as foretelling their ruin (*Thou shalt bear thy shame*) or as inviting them to repentance: "Be thou confounded and bear thy shame; take the shame to thyself that is due to thee." It may be hoped that sinners will forsake their sins when they begin to be heartily ashamed of them. And therefore they shall go into captivity, and there they shall lie, that they may be *confounded in all that they have done*, because they had been a comfort and encouragement to Sodom and Samaria, v. 54. Note, There is nothing in sin which we have more reason to be ashamed of than this, that by our sin we have encouraged others in sin, and comforted them in that for which they must be grieved or they are undone. Another reason why they must now

be ashamed is because in the day of their prosperity they had looked with so much disdain upon their neighbours: *Thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thee in the day of thy pride*, v. 56. They thought Sodom not worthy to be named the same day with Jerusalem, little dreaming that Jerusalem would at length lie under a worse and more scandalous character than Sodom herself. Those that are high may perhaps come to stand upon a level with those they condemn. Or "Sodom was *not mentioned*, that is, the warning designed to be given to thee by Sodom's ruin was not regarded." If the Jews had but talked more frequently and seriously to one another, and to their children, concerning *the wrath of God revealed from heaven against Sodom's ungodliness and unrighteousness*, it might have kept them in awe, and prevented their treading in their steps; but they kept the thought of it at a distance, would not bear the mention of it, and (as the ancients say) put Isaiah to death for putting them in mind of it, when he called them *rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah*, Isa. i. 10. Note, Those are but preparing judgments for themselves that will not take notice of God's judgments upon others.

4. What desolations God had brought and was bringing upon Jerusalem for these wickednesses, wherein they had exceeded Sodom and Samaria. (1.) She has already long ago been disgraced, and has fallen into contempt, among her neighbours (v. 57): *Before her wickedness was discovered*, before she came to be so grossly and openly flagitious, she bore the just punishment of her secret and more concealed lewdness, when she fell under *the reproach of the daughters of Syria, of the Philistines*, who were said to *despise her and be ashamed of her* (v. 27), and under the reproach of *all that were round about her*, which seems to refer to the descent made upon Judah by the Syrians in the days of Ahaz, and soon after another by the Philistines, 2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 18. Note, Those that disgrace themselves by yielding to their lusts will justly be brought into disgrace by being made to yield to their enemies; and it is observable that before God brought potent enemies upon them, for *their destruction*, he brought enemies upon them that were less formidable, *for their reproach*. If less judgments would do the work, God would not send greater. In this *thou hast borne thy lewdness*, v. 58. Those that will not cast off their sins by repentance and reformation shall be made to bear their sins to their confusion. (2.) She is now in *captivity*, or hastening into captivity, and therein is reckoned with, not only for her lewdness (v. 58), but for her perfidiousness and covenant-breaking (v. 59): "I will deal with thee as thou hast done; I will forsake thee as thou hast forsaken me, and cast thee off as thou hast cast me off, for thou hast *despised*



the oath, in breaking the covenant." This seems to be meant of the covenant God made with their fathers at Mount Sinai, whereby he took them and theirs to be a peculiar people to himself. They flattered themselves with a conceit that because God had hitherto continued his favour to them, notwithstanding their provocations, he would do so still. "No," says God, "you have broken covenant with me, have despised both the promises of the covenant and the obligations of it, and therefore I will deal with thee as thou hast done." Note, Those that will not adhere to God as their God have no reason to expect that he should continue to own them as his people. (3.) The captivity of the wicked Jews, and their ruin, shall be as irrevocable as that of Sodom and Samaria. In this sense, as a threatening, most interpreters take v. 53, 55. "*When I shall bring again the captivity of Sodom and Samaria, and when they shall return to their former estate, then I will bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them, and as it were for their sakes, and under their shadow and protection, because they are more righteous than thou, and then thou shalt return to thy former estate.*" But Sodom and Samaria were never brought back, nor ever returned to their former estate, and therefore let not Jerusalem expect it, that is, those who now remained there, whom God would deliver to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, Jer. xxiv. 9, 10. Sooner shall the Sodomites arise out of the salt sea, and the Samaritans return out of the land of Assyria, than they enjoy their peace and prosperity again; for, to their shame be it spoken, it is a comfort to those of the ten tribes, who are dispersed and in captivity, to see those of the two tribes who had been as bad as they, or worse, in like manner dispersed and in captivity; and therefore they shall live and die, shall stand and fall, together. The bad ones of both shall perish together; the good ones of both shall return together. Note, Those who do as the worst of sinners do must expect to fare as they fare. *Let my enemy be as the wicked.*

60 Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. 61 Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. 62 And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: 63 That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth

any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.

Here, in the close of the chapter, after a most shameful conviction of sin and a most dreadful denunciation of judgments, mercy is remembered, mercy is reserved, for those who shall come after. As was when God swore in his wrath concerning those who came out of Egypt that they should not enter Canaan, "Yet" (says God) "your little ones shall;" so here. And some think that what is said of the return of Sodom and Samaria (v. 53, 55), and of Jerusalem with them, is a promise; it may be understood so, if by Sodom we understand (as Grotius and some of the Jewish writers do) the Moabites and Ammonites, the posterity of Lot, who once dwelt in Sodom; their captivity was returned (Jer. xlviii. 47; xlix. 6), as was that of many of the ten tribes, and Judah's with them. But these closing verses are, without doubt, a precious promise, which was in part fulfilled at the return of the penitent and reformed Jews out of Babylon, but was to have its full accomplishment in gospel-times, and in that repentance and that remission of sins which should then be preached with success to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Now observe here,

I. Whence this mercy should take rise—from God himself, and his remembering his covenant with them (v. 60): Nevertheless, though they had been so provoking, and God had been provoked to such a degree that one would think they could never be reconciled again, yet "*I will remember my covenant with thee, that covenant which I made with thee in the days of thy youth, and will revive it again.*" Though thou hast broken the covenant (v. 59), I will remember it, and it shall flourish again." See how much it is our comfort and advantage that God is pleased to deal with us in a covenant-way, for thus the mercies of it come to be sure mercies and everlasting (Isa. lv. 3); and, while this root stands firmly in the ground, there is hope of the tree, though it be cut down, that through the scent of water it will bud again. We do not find that they put him in mind of the covenant, but *ex mero motu*—from his own mere good pleasure, he remembers it as he had promised. Lev. xxvi. 42, *Then will I remember my covenant, and will remember the land.* He that bids us to be ever mindful of the covenant no doubt will himself be ever mindful of it, the word which he commanded (and what he commands stands fast for ever) to a thousand generations.

II. How they should be prepared and qualified for this mercy (v. 61): "*Thou shalt remember thy ways, thy evil ways;* God will put thee in mind of them, will set them in order before thee, that thou mayest be ashamed of them." Note, God's good work

in us commences and keeps pace with his good-will towards us. When he remembers his covenant for us, that he may not remember our sins against us, he puts us upon remembering our sins against ourselves. And if we will but be brought to remember our ways, how crooked and perverse they have been and how we have walked contrary to God in them, we cannot but be shamed; and, when we are so, we are best prepared to receive the honour and comfort of a sealed pardon and a settled peace.

III. What the mercy is that God has in reserve for them. 1. He will take them into covenant with himself (v. 60): *I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant*; and again (v. 62), *I will establish, re-establish, and establish more firmly than ever, my covenant with thee*. Note, It is an unspeakable comfort to all true penitents that the covenant of grace is so well ordered in all things that every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of the covenant, for that is inviolable. 2. He will bring the Gentiles into church-communion with them (v. 61): *"Thou shalt receive thy sisters, the Gentile nations that are round about thee, thy elder and thy younger, greater than thou art and less, ancient nations and modern, and I will give them unto thee for daughters; they shall be founded, nursed, taught, and educated, by that gospel, that word of the Lord, which shall go forth from Zion and from Jerusalem; so that all the neighbours shall call Jerusalem mother, while the church continues there, and shall acknowledge the Jerusalem which is from above, and which is free, to be the mother of us all, Gal. iv. 26. They shall be thy daughters, but not by thy covenant, not by the covenant of peculiarity, not as being proselytes to the Jewish religion and subject to the yoke of the ceremonial law, but as being converts with thee to the Christian religion."* Or *not by thy covenant* may mean, "not upon such terms as thou shalt think fit to impose upon them as conquered nations, as captives and hotnagers to whom thou mayest give law at pleasure" (such a dominion as that the carnal Jews hope to have over the nations); "no, they shall be thy daughters by my covenant, the covenant of grace made with thee and them in concert, as an *indenture tripartite*. I will be a Father, a common Father, both to Jews and Gentiles, and so they shall become sisters to one another. And, when thou shalt receive them, thou shalt be ashamed of thy own evil ways wherein thou wast conformed to them. Thou shalt blush to look a Gentile in the face, remembering how much worse than the Gentiles thou wast in the day of thy apostasy."

IV. What the fruit and effect of this will be. 1. God will hereby be glorified (v. 62): *"Thou shalt know that I am the Lord"*. It shall hereby be known that the God of Israel is Jehovah, a God of power, and faith-

ful to his covenant; and thou shalt know it who hast hitherto lived as if thou didst not know or believe it." It had often been said in wrath, *You shall know that I am the Lord*, shall know it to your cost; here it is said in mercy, *You shall know it to your comfort*; and it is one of the most precious promises of the new covenant which God has made with us that *all shall know him from the least to the greatest*. 2. They shall hereby be more humbled and abased for sin (v. 63): *"That thou mayest be the more confounded at the remembrance of all that thou hast done amiss, mayest reproach thyself for it and call thyself a thousand times unwise, undutiful, ungrateful, and unlike what thou wast, and mayest never open thy mouth any more in contradiction to God, reflection on him, or complaints of him, but mayest be for ever silent and submissive because of thy shame."* Note, Those that rightly remember their sins will be truly ashamed of them; and those that are truly ashamed of their sins will see great reason to be patient under their afflictions, to be dumb, and not open their mouths against what God does. But that which is most observable is, that all this shall be *when I am pacified towards thee, saith the Lord God*. Note, It is the gracious ingenuousness of true penitents that the clearer evidences and the fuller instances they have of God's being reconciled to them the more grieved and ashamed they are that ever they have offended God. God is in Jesus Christ *pacified towards us*; he is our peace, and it is by his cross that we are reconciled, and in his gospel that God is reconciling the world to himself. Now the consideration of this should be powerful to melt our hearts into a godly sorrow for sin. This is repenting because *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The prodigal, after he had received the kiss which assured him that his father was *pacified towards him*, was ashamed and confounded, and said, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee*. And the more our shame for sin is increased by the sense of pardoning mercy the more will our comfort in God be increased.

## CHAP. XVII.

God was, in the foregoing chapter, reckoning with the people of Judah, and bringing ruin upon them for their treachery in breaking covenant with him; in this chapter he is reckoning with the king of Judah for his treachery in breaking covenant with the king of Babylon; for when God came to contend with them he found many grounds of his controversy. The thing was now in doling: Zedekiah was practising with the king of Egypt underhand for assistance in a treacherous project he had formed to shake off the yoke of the king of Babylon, and violate the homage and fealty he had sworn to him. For this God by the prophet here, I. Threatens the ruin of him and his kingdom, by a parable of two eagles and a vine (ver. 1-10), and the explanation of that parable, ver. 11-21. But, in the close, II. He promises hereafter to raise the royal family of Judah again, the house of David, in the Messiah and his kingdom, ver. 22-24.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; 3 And say,



Thus saith the Lord God; A great eagle with great wings, long-winged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: 4 He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffick; he set it in a city of merchants. 5 He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow-tree. 6 And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs. 7 There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. 8 It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. 9 Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. 10 Yea, behold, *being* planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew. 11 Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 12 Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these *things mean*? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon; 13 And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land: 14 That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. 15 But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt,

that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such *things*? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered? 16 *As* I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place *where* the king *dwelleth* that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, *even* with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. 17 Neither shall Pharaoh with *his* mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: 18 Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these *things*, he shall not escape. 19 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; *As* I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head. 20 And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. 21 And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it.

We must take all these verses together, that we may have the parable and the explanation of it at one view before us, because they will illustrate one another. 1. The prophet is appointed to *put forth a riddle* to the house of Israel (v. 2), not to puzzle them, as Samson's riddle was put forth to the Philistines, not to hide the mind of God from them in obscurity, or to leave them in uncertainty about it, one advancing one conjecture and another another, as is usual in expounding riddles; no, he is immediately to tell them the meaning of it. *Let him that speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret*, 1 Cor. xiv. 13. But he must deliver this message in a riddle or parable that they might take the more notice of it, might be the more affected with it themselves, and might the better remember it and tell it to others. For these reasons God often used similitudes by his servants the prophets, and Christ himself *opened his mouth in parables*. Riddles and parables are used for an amusement to ourselves and an entertainment to our friends. The prophet must make use of these to see if in this dress the things of God might find acceptance, and insinuate themselves into the

minds of a careless people. Note, Ministers should study to find out acceptable words, and try various methods to do good; and, as far as they have reason to think will be for edification, should both bring that which is familiar into their preaching and their preaching too into their familiar discourse, that there may not be so vast a dissimilitude as with some there is between what they say in the pulpit and what they say out. 2. He is appointed to expound this riddle to the rebellious house, v. 12. Though being rebellious they might justly have been left in ignorance, to see and hear and not perceive, yet the thing shall be explained to them: *Know you not what these things mean?* Those that knew the story, and what was now in agitation, might make a shrewd guess at the meaning of this riddle, but, that they might be left without excuse, he is to give it to them in plain terms, stripped of the metaphor. But the enigma was first propounded for them to study on awhile, and to send to their friends at Jerusalem, that they might enquire after and expect the solution of it some time after.

Let us now see what the matter of this message is.

I. Nebuchadnezzar had some time ago carried off Jehoiachin, the same that was called *Jeconiah*, when he was but eighteen years of age and had reigned in Jerusalem but *three months*, him and his princes and great men, and had brought them captives to Babylon, 2 Kings xxiv. 12. This in the parable is represented by an eagle's cropping the top and tender branch of a cedar, and carrying it into a *land of traffic*, a city of merchants (v. 3, 4), which is explained, v. 12. The king of Babylon took the king of Jerusalem, who was no more able to resist him than a young twig of a tree is to contend with the strongest bird of prey, that easily crops it off, perhaps towards the making of her nest. Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel's vision, is a lion, the king of beasts (Dan. vii. 4); there he has eagle's wings, so swift were his motions, so speedy were his conquests. Here, in this parable, he is an eagle, the king of birds, a great eagle, that lives upon spoil and rapine, whose young ones suck up blood, Job xxxix. 30. His dominion extends itself far and wide, like the great and long wings of an eagle; the people are numerous, for it is full of feathers; the court is splendid, for it has divers colours, which look like embroidery, as the word is. Jerusalem is Lebanon, a forest of houses, and very pleasant. The royal family is the cedar; Jehoiachin is the top branch, the top of the young twigs, which he crops off. Babylon is the land of traffic and city of merchants where it is set. And the king of Judah, being of the house of David, will think himself much degraded and disgraced to be lodged among tradesmen; but he must make the best of it.

II. When he carried him to Babylon he

made his uncle Zedekiah king in his room, v. 5, 6. His name was *Mattaniah—the gift of the Lord*, which Nebuchadnezzar changed into *Zedekiah—the justice of the Lord*, to remind him to be just like the God he called his, for fear of his justice. This was one of the seed of the land, a native, not a foreigner, not one of his Babylonian princes; he was planted in a fruitful field, for so Jerusalem as yet was; he placed it by great waters, where it would be likely to grow, like a willow-tree, which grows quickly, and grows best in moist ground, but is never designed nor expected to be a stately tree. He set it with care and circumspection (so some read it); he wisely provided that it might grow, but that it might not grow too big. He took of the king's seed (so it is explained, v. 13) and made a covenant with him that he should have the kingdom, and enjoy the regal power and dignity, provided he held it as his vassal, dependent on him and accountable to him. He took an oath of him, made him swear allegiance to him, swear by his own God, the God of Israel, that he would be a faithful tributary to him, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13. He also took away the mighty of the land, the chief of the men of war, partly as hostages for the performance of the covenant, and partly that, the land being thereby weakened, the king might be the less able, and therefore the less in temptation, to break his league. What he designed we are told (v. 14): *That the kingdom might be base*, in respect both of honour and strength, might neither be a rival with its powerful neighbours, nor a terror to its feeble ones, as it had been, that it might not lift up itself to vie with the kingdom of Babylon, or to bear down any of the petty states that were in subjection to it. But yet he designed that by the keeping of this covenant it might stand, and continue a kingdom. Hereby the pride and ambition of that haughty potentate would be gratified, who aimed to be like the Most High (Isa. xiv. 14), to have all about him subject to him. Now see here, 1. How sad a change sin made with the royal family of Judah. Time was when all the nations about were tributaries to that; now that has not only lost its dominion over other nations, but has itself become a tributary. *How has the gold become dim!* Nations by sin sell their liberty, and princes their dignity, and profane their crowns by casting them to the ground. 2. How wisely Zedekiah did for himself in accepting these terms, though they were dishonourable, when necessity brought him to it. A man may live very comfortably and contentedly, though he cannot bear a part, and make a figure, as formerly. A kingdom may stand firmly and safely, though it do not stand so high as it has sometimes done; and so may a family.

III. Zedekiah, while he continued faithful to the king of Babylon, did very well, and, if he would but have reformed his kingdom,



and returned to God and his duty, he would have done better, and by that means might soon have recovered his former dignity, *v. 6*. This plant grew, and though it was set as a willow-tree, and little account was made of it, yet it became a spreading vine of low stature, a great blessing to his own country, and his fruits made glad their hearts; and it is better to be a spreading vine of low stature than a lofty cedar of no use. Nebuchadnezzar was pleased, for the branches turned towards him, and rested on him as the vine on the wall, and he had his share of the fruits of this vine; the roots thereof too were under him, and at his disposal. The Jews had reason to be pleased, for they sat under their own vine, which brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs, and looked pleasant and promising. See how gradually the judgments of God came upon this provoking people, how God gave them respite and so gave them space to repent. He made their kingdom base, to try if that would humble them, before he made it no kingdom; yet left it easy for them, to try if that would win upon them to return to him, that the troubles threatened might be prevented.

IV. Zedekiah knew not when he was well off, but grew impatient of the disgrace of being a tributary to the king of Babylon, and, to get clear of it, entered into a private league with the king of Egypt. He had no reason to complain that the king of Babylon put any new hardships upon him or improved his advantages against him, that he oppressed or impoverished his country, for, as the prophet had said before (*v. 6*) to aggravate his treachery, he shows again (*v. 8*) what a fair way he was in to be considerable: *He was planted in a good soil by great waters*; his family was likely enough to be built up, and his exchequer to be filled, in a little time, so that, if he had dealt faithfully, he might have been a goodly vine. But there was another great eagle that he had an affection for, and put a confidence in, and that was the king of Egypt, *v. 7*. Those two great potentates, the kings of Babylon and Egypt, were but two great eagles, birds of prey. This great eagle of Egypt is said to have great wings, but not to be long-winged as the king of Babylon, because, though the kingdom of Egypt was strong, yet it was not of such a vast extent as that of Babylon was. The great eagle is said to have many feathers, much wealth and many soldiers, which he depended upon as a substantial defence, but which really were no more than so many feathers. Zedekiah, promising himself liberty, made himself a vassal to the king of Egypt, foolishly expecting ease by changing his master. Now this vine did secretly and under-hand bend her roots towards the king of Egypt, that great eagle, and after awhile did openly shoot forth her branches towards him, give him an intimation how much she coveted an alliance with him, that he might

water it by the furrows of her plantation, whereas it was planted by great waters, and did not need any assistance from him. This is expounded, *v. 15*. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people, to enable him to contend with the king of Babylon. See what a change sin had made with the people of God! God promised that they should be a numerous people, as the sand of the sea; yet now, if their king had occasion for much people, he must send to Egypt for them, they being for sin diminished and brought low, *Ps. cvii. 39*. See also the folly of fretful discontented spirits, that ruin themselves by striving to better themselves, whereas they might be easy and happy enough if they would but make the best of that which is.

V. God here threatens Zedekiah with the utter destruction of him and his kingdom, and, in displeasure against him, passes that doom upon him for his treacherous revolt from the king of Babylon. 'This is represented in the parable (*v. 9, 19*) by the plucking up of this vine by the roots, the cutting off of the fruit, and the withering of the leaves, the leaves of her spring, when they are in their greenness (*Job viii. 12*), before they begin in autumn to wither of themselves. The project shall be blasted; it shall utterly wither. The affairs of this perfidious prince shall be ruined past retrieve; as a vine when the east wind blasts it, so that it shall be fit for nothing but the fire (as we had it in that parable, *ch. xv. 4*), it shall wither even in the furrows where it grew, though they were ever so well watered. It shall be destroyed without great power or many people to pluck it up; for what need is there of raising the militia to pluck up a vine? Note, God can bring great things to pass without much ado. He needs not great power and many people to effect his purposes; a handful will serve if he pleases. He can without any difficulty ruin a sinful king and kingdom, and make no more of it than we do of rooting up a tree that cumpers the ground. In the explanation of the parable the sentence is very largely recorded: *Shall he prosper?* *v. 15*. Can he expect to do ill and fare well? Nay, shall he that does such wicked things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and be delivered from that vengeance which is the just punishment of his treachery? No; can he expect to do ill and not suffer ill? Let him hear his doom.

1. It is ratified by the oath of God (*v. 16*): *As I live, saith the Lord God, he shall die for it*. This intimates how highly God resented the crime, and how sure and severe the punishment of it would be. God swears in his wrath, as he did *Ps. xcv. 11*. Note, As God's promises are confirmed with an oath, for comfort to the saints, so are his threatenings, for terror to the wicked. As sure as God lives and is happy (I may add, and as long),

so sure, so long, shall impenitent sinners die and be miserable.

2. It is justified by the heinousness of the crime he had been guilty of. (1.) He had been very ungrateful to his benefactor, who had *made him king*, and undertook to protect him, had made him a prince when he might as easily have made him a prisoner. Note, It is a sin against God to be unkind to our friends and to lift up the heel against those that have helped to raise us. (2.) He had been very false to him whom he had covenanted with. This is mostly insisted on: He *despised the oath*. When his conscience or friends reminded him of it he made a jest of it, put on a daring resolution, and *broke it*, v. 15, 16, 18, 19. He broke through it, and took a pride in making nothing of it, as a great tyrant in our own day, whose maxim (they say) it is, *That princes ought not to be slaves to their word any further than it is for their interest*. That which aggravated Zedekiah's perfidiousness was that the oath by which he had bound himself to the king of Babylon was, [1.] A solemn oath. An emphasis is laid upon this (v. 18): *When, lo, he had given his hand*, as a confederate with the king of Babylon, not only as his subject, but as his friend, the joining of hands being a token of the joining of hearts. [2.] A sacred oath. God says (v. 19): *It is my oath that he has despised and my covenant that he has broken*. In every solemn oath God is appealed to as a witness of the sincerity of him that swears, and invoked as a judge and revenger of his treachery if he now swear falsely or at any time hereafter break his oath. But the oath of allegiance to a prince is particularly called *the oath of God* (Eccl. viii. 2), as if that had something in it more sacred than another oath; for princes are *ministers of God to us for good*, Rom. xiii. 4. Now Zedekiah's breaking this oath and covenant is the sin which God will *recompense upon his own head* (v. 19), *the trespass which he has trespassed against God*, for which God will *plead with him*, v. 20. Note, Perjury is a heinous sin and highly provoking to the God of heaven. It would not serve for an excuse, *First*, That he who took this oath was a king, a king of the house of David, whose liberty and dignity might surely set him above the obligation of oaths. No; though kings are gods to us, they are men to God, and not exempt from his law and judgment. The prince is doubtless as firmly bound before God to the people by his coronation-oath as the people are to the prince by the oath of allegiance. *Secondly*, Nor that this oath was sworn to the king of Babylon, a heathen prince, worse than a heretic, with whom the church of Rome says, *No faith is to be kept*. No; though Nebuchadnezzar was a worshipper of false gods, yet the true God will avenge this quarrel when one of his worshippers breaks his league with him; for truth is a debt due to all men; and, if the

professors of the true religion deal perfidiously with those of a false religion, their profession will be so far from excusing, much less justifying them, that it aggravates their sin, and God will the more surely and severely punish it, because by it they give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; as that Mahometan prince, who, when the Christians broke their league with him, cried out, *O Jesus! are these thy Christians?* *Thirdly*, Nor would it justify him that the oath was extorted from him by a conqueror, for the covenant was made upon a valuable consideration. He held his life and crown upon this condition, that he should be faithful and bear true allegiance to the king of Babylon; and, if he enjoy the benefit of his bargain, it is very unjust if he do not observe the terms. Let him know then that, having *despised the oath*, and *broken the covenant*, he *shall not escape*. And if the contempt and violation of such an oath, such a covenant as this, would be so punished, of how much sorer punishment shall those be thought worthy who break covenant with God (when, *lo, they had given their hand* upon it that they would be faithful), who *tread under foot the blood of that covenant* as an unholy thing? Between the covenants there is no comparison.

3. It is particularized in divers instances, wherein the punishment is made to answer the sin. (1.) He had rebelled against the king of Babylon, and the king of Babylon should be his effectual conqueror. In the place where that king *dwells* whose *covenant he broke*, even *with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die*, v. 16. He thinks to get out of his hands, but he shall fall, more than before, into his hands. God himself will now take part with the king of Babylon against him: *I will spread my net upon him*, v. 20. God has a net for those who deal perfidiously and think to escape his righteous judgments, in which those shall be taken and held who would not be held by the bond of an oath and covenant. Zedekiah dreaded Babylon: *"Thither I will bring him,"* says God, *"and plead with him there."* Men will justly be forced upon that calamity which they endeavour by sin to flee from. (2.) He had *relied upon the king of Egypt*, and the king of Egypt should be his ineffectual helper: *Pharaoh with his mighty army shall not make for him in the war* (v. 17), shall do him no service, nor give any check to the progress of the Chaldean forces; he shall not assist him in the *siege by casting up mounts and building forts*, nor in battle by *cutting off many persons*. Note, Every creature is that to us which God makes it to be; and he commonly weakens and withers that *arm of flesh* which we trust in and stay ourselves upon. Now was again fulfilled what was spoken on a former similar occasion (Isa. xxx. 7), *The Egyptians shall help in vain*. They did so; for though, upon the approach



of the Egyptian army, the Chaldeans withdrew from the siege of Jerusalem, upon their retreat they returned to it again and took it. It should seem, the Egyptians were not hearty, had strength enough, but no goodwill, to help Zedekiah. Note, Those who deal treacherously with those who put a confidence in them will justly be dealt treacherously with by those they put a confidence in. Yet the Egyptians were not the only states Zedekiah stayed himself upon; he had bands of his own to stand by him, but those bands, though we may suppose they were veteran troops and the best soldiers his kingdom afforded, shall become *fugitives*, shall quit their posts, and make the best of their way, and shall *fall by the sword* of the enemy, and the *remains of them shall be scattered*, v. 21. This was fulfilled *when the city was broken up and all the men of war fled*, Jer. lii. 7. Then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken it. Note, Sooner or later God's word will prove itself; and those who will not believe shall find by experience the reality and weight of it.

22 Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: 23 In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it.

When the royal family of Judah was brought to desolation by the captivity of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah it might be asked, "What has now become of the covenant of royalty made with David, that *his children should sit upon his throne for evermore*? Do the *sure mercies of David* prove thus unsure?" To this it is sufficient for the silencing of the objectors to answer that the promise was conditional. If they will keep my covenant, then they shall continue, Ps. cxxxii. 12. But David's posterity broke the condition, and so forfeited the promise. But the unbelief of man shall not invalidate the promise of God. He will find out another *seed of David* in which it shall be accomplished; and that is promised in these verses.

I. The house of David shall again be

magnified, and out of its ashes another phoenix shall arise. The metaphor of a tree, which was made use of in the threatening, is here presented in the promise, v. 22, 23. This promise had its accomplishment in part when Zerubbabel, a branch of the house of David, was raised up to head the Jews in their return out of captivity, and to rebuild the city and temple and re-establish their church and state; but it was to have its full accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, who was a root out of a dry ground, and to whom God, according to promise, gave the *throne of his father David*, Luke i. 32. 1. God himself undertakes the reviving and restoring of the house of David. Nebuchadnezzar was the *great eagle* that had attempted the re-establishing of the house of David in a dependence upon him, v. 5. But the attempt miscarried; his plantation withered and was plucked up. "Well," says God, "the next shall be of my planting: *I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar and I will set it*." Note, As men have their designs, God also has his designs; but his will prosper when theirs are blasted. Nebuchadnezzar prided himself in setting up kingdoms at his pleasure, Dan. v. 19. But those kingdoms soon had an end, whereas the *God of heaven sets up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed*, Dan. ii. 44. 2. The house of David is revived in a *tender one cropped from the top of his young twigs*. Zerubbabel was so; that which was hopeful in him was but the *day of small things* (Zech. iv. 10), yet before him *great mountains were made plain*. Our Lord Jesus was the *highest branch of the high cedar*, the furthest of all from the root (for soon after he appeared the *house of David* was all cut off and extinguished), but the nearest of all to heaven, for his kingdom was not of this world. He was *taken from the top of the young twigs*, for he is the *man, the branch, a tender plant*, and a *root out of a dry ground* (Isa. liii. 2), but a *branch of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified*. 3. This branch is planted in a *high mountain* (v. 22), in the *mountain of the height of Israel*, v. 23. Thither he brought Zerubbabel in triumph; there he raised up his son Jesus, sent him to gather the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* that were scattered upon the mountains, sent him his king upon his *holy hill of Zion*, sent forth the gospel from Mount Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; there, in the *height of Israel*, a nation which all its neighbours had an eye upon as conspicuous and illustrious, was the Christian church first planted. The churches of Judea were the most primitive churches. The unbelieving Jews did what they could to prevent its being planted there; but who can pluck up what God will plant? 4. Thence it spreads far and wide. The Jewish state, though it began very low in Zerubbabel's time, was set as a tender branch, which

might easily be plucked up, yet took root, spread strangely, and after some time became very considerable; those of other nations, *fowl of every wing*, put themselves under the protection of it. The Christian church was at first like a grain of mustard-seed, but became, like this tender branch, a great tree, its beginning small, but its latter end increasing to admiration. When the Gentiles flocked into the church then did the *fowl of every wing* (even the birds of prey, which those preyed upon, as the *wolf and the lamb* feeding together, Isa. xi. 6) come and dwell under the shadow of this goodly cedar. See Dan. iv. 21.

II. God himself will herein be glorified, v. 24. The setting up of the Messiah's kingdom in the world shall discover more clearly than ever to the children of men that *God is the King of all the earth*, Ps. xlvii. 7. Never was there a more full conviction given of this truth, that all things are governed by an infinitely wise and mighty Providence, than that which was given by the exaltation of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom among men; for by that it appeared that God has all hearts in his hand, and the sovereign disposal of all affairs. *All the trees of the field shall know*, 1. That the tree which God will have to be brought down, and dried up, shall be so, though it be ever so high and stately, ever so green and flourishing. Neither honour nor wealth, neither external advancements nor internal endowments, will secure men from humbling withering providences. 2. That the trees which God will have to be exalted, and to flourish, shall so be, shall so do, though ever so low, and ever so dry. The house of Nebuchadnezzar, that now makes so great a figure, shall be extirpated, and the house of David, that now makes so mean a figure, shall become famous again; and the Jewish nation, that is now despicable, shall be considerable. The kingdom of Satan, that has borne so long, so large, a sway, shall be broken, and the kingdom of Christ, that was looked upon with contempt, shall be established. The Jews, who, in respect of church-privileges, had been high and green, shall be thrown out, and the Gentiles, who had been low and dry trees, shall be taken in their room, Isa. liv. 1. All the enemies of Christ shall be abased and made his footstool, and his interests shall be confirmed and advanced: *I the Lord have spoken* (it is the decree, the declared decree, that Christ must be exalted, must be the head-stone of the corner), and *I have done it*, that is, I will do it in due time, but it is as sure to be done as if it were done already. With men saying and doing are two things, but they are not so with God. What he has spoken we may be sure that he will do, nor shall one iota or tittle of his word fall to the ground, for *he is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent* either of his threatenings or of his promises.

## CHAP. XVIII.

Perhaps, in reading some of the foregoing chapters, we may have been tempted to think ourselves not much concerned in them (though they also were written for our learning); but this chapter, at first view, appears highly and nearly to concern us all, very highly, very nearly; for, without particular reference to Judah and Jerusalem, it lays down the rule of judgment according to which God will deal with the children of men in determining them to their everlasting state, and it agrees with that very ancient rule laid down, Gen. lv. 7, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" But, "If not, sin," the punishment of sin, "lies at the door." Here is, I. The corrupt proverb used by the profane Jews, which gave occasion to the message here sent them, and made it necessary for the justifying of God in his dealings with them, ver. 1-3. II. The reply given to this proverb, in which God asserts in general his own sovereignty and justice, ver. 4. Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with them, ver. 4, 20. But say to the righteous, it shall be well with them, ver. 5-9. In particular, as to the case complained of, he assures us, 1. That it shall be ill with a wicked man, though he had a good father, ver. 10-13. 2. That it shall be well with a good man, though he had a wicked father, ver. 14-18. And therefore in this God is righteous, ver. 19, 20. 3. That it shall be well with penitents, though they began ever so ill, ver. 21-23, and again ver. 27, 28. 4. That it shall be ill with apostates, though they began ever so well, ver. 24, 25. And the use of all this is, (1.) To justify God and clear the equity of all his proceedings, ver. 25, 28. (2.) To engage and encourage us to repent of our sins and turn to God, ver. 30-32. And these are things which belong to our everlasting peace. O that we may understand and regard them before they be hidden from our eyes!

THE word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, 2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? 3 As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. 5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, 6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, 7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; 8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, 9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to do truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God.

Evil manners, we say, beget good laws; and in like manner sometimes unjust reflections occasion just vindications; evil proverbs beget good prophecies. Here is,

I. An evil proverb commonly used by the



Jews in their captivity. We had one before (*ch. xii. 22*) and a reply to it; here we have another. That sets God's justice at defiance: "*The days are prolonged and every vision fails*; the threatenings are a jest." This charges him with injustice, as if the judgments executed were a wrong: "You use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, now that it is laid waste by the judgments of God, saying, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge*; we are punished for the sins of our ancestors, which is as great an absurdity in the divine regimen as if the children should have their teeth set on edge, or stupified, by the fathers' eating sour grapes, whereas, in the order of natural causes, if men eat or drink any thing amiss, they only themselves shall suffer by it." Now, 1. It must be owned that there was some occasion given for this proverb. God had often said that he would visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, especially the sin of idolatry, intending thereby to express the evil of sin, of that sin, his detestation of it, and just indignation against it, and the heavy punishments he would bring upon idolaters, that parents might be restrained from sin by their affection to their children and that children might not be drawn to sin by their reverence for their parents. He had likewise often declared by his prophets that in bringing the present ruin upon Judah and Jerusalem he had an eye to the sins of Manasseh and other preceding kings; for, looking upon the nation as a body politic, and punishing them with national judgments for national sins, and admitting the maxim in our law that *a corporation never dies*, reckoning with them now for the iniquities of former ages was but like making a man, when he is old, to possess the iniquities of his youth, *Job xiii. 26*. And there is no unrighteousness with God in doing so. But, 2. They intended it as a reflection upon God, and an impeachment of his equity in his proceedings against them. Thus far that is right which is implied in this proverbial saying, That those who are guilty of wilful sin eat sour grapes; they do that which they will feel from, sooner or later. The grapes may look well enough in the temptation, but they will be bitter as bitterness itself in the reflection. They will set the sinner's teeth on edge. When conscience is awake, and sets the sin in order before them, it will spoil the relish of their comforts as when the teeth are set on edge. But they suggest it as unreasonable that the children should smart for the fathers' folly and feel the pain of that which they never tasted the pleasure of, and that God was unrighteous in thus taking vengeance and could not justify it. See how wicked the reflection is, how daring the impudence; yet see how witty it is, and how sly the comparison. Many that are impious in their jeers are ingenious in their jests; and thus the malice

of hell against God and religion is insinuated and propagated. It is here put into a proverb, and that proverb used, commonly used; they had it up ever and anon. And, though it had plainly a blasphemous meaning, yet they sheltered themselves under the similitude from the imputation of downright blasphemy. Now by this it appears that they were unhumiliated under the rod, for, instead of condemning themselves and justifying God, they condemned him and justified themselves; but woe to him that thus strives with his Maker.

II. A just reproof of, and reply to, this proverb: *What mean you by using it?* That is the reproof. "Do you intend hereby to try it out with God? Or can you think any other than that you will hereby provoke him to be angry with you till he has consumed you? Is this the way to reconcile yourselves to him and make your peace with him?" The reply follows, in which God tells them,

1. That the use of the proverb should be taken away. This is said, it is sworn (*v. 3*): *You shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb*; or (as it may be read), *You shall not have the use of this parable*. The taking away of this parable is made the matter of a promise, *Jer. xxxi. 29*. Here it is made the matter of a threatening. There it intimates that God will return to them in ways of mercy; here it intimates that God would proceed against them in ways of judgment. He will so punish them for this impudent saying that they shall not dare to use it any more; as in another case, *Jer. xxiii. 34, 36*. God will find out effectual ways to silence those cavillers. Or God will so manifest both to themselves and others that they have wickedness of their own enough to bring all these desolating judgments upon them that they shall no longer for shame lay it upon the sins of their fathers that they were thus dealt with: "Your own consciences shall tell you, and all your neighbours shall confirm it, that you yourselves have eaten the same sour grapes that your fathers ate before you, or else your teeth would not have been set on edge."

2. That really the saying itself was unjust and a causeless reflection upon God's government. For,

(1.) God does not punish the children for the fathers' sins unless they tread in their fathers' steps and fill up the measure of their iniquity (*Matt. xxiii. 32*), and then they have no reason to complain, for, whatever they suffer, it is less than their own sin has deserved. And, when God speaks of visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, that is so far from putting any hardship upon the children, to whom he only renders according to their works, that it accounts for God's patience with the parents, whom he therefore does not punish immediately, because he lays up their iniquity for their children, *Job xxi. 19*.

(2.) It is only in temporal calamities that

children (and sometimes innocent ones) fare the worse for their parents' wickedness, and God can alter the property of those calamities, and make them work for good to those that are visited with them; but as to spiritual and eternal misery (and that is the death here spoken of) the children shall by no means smart for the parents' sins. This is here shown at large; and it is a wonderful piece of condescension that the great God is pleased to reason the case with such wicked and unreasonable men, that he did not immediately strike them dumb or dead, but vouchsafed to state the matter before them, that he may be clear when he is judged. Now, in his reply,

[1.] He asserts and maintains his own absolute and incontestable sovereignty: *Behold, all souls are mine, v. 4.* God here claims a property in all the souls of the children of men, one as well as another. *First*, Souls are his. He that is the Maker of *all things* is in a particular manner the *Father of spirits*, for his image is stamped on the souls of men; it was so in their creation; it is so in their renovation. He *forms the spirit of man within him*, and is therefore called *the God of the spirits of all flesh*, of embodied spirits. *Secondly*, All souls are his, all created by him and for him, and accountable to him. *As the soul of the father, so the soul of the son, is mine.* Our earthly parents are only the *fathers of our flesh*; our souls are not theirs; God challenges them. Now hence it follows, for the clearing of this matter, 1. That God may certainly do what he pleases both with fathers and children, and none may say unto him, *What dost thou?* He that gave us our being does us no wrong if he takes it away again, much less when he only takes away some of the supports and comforts of it; it is as absurd to quarrel with him as for the thing formed to say to him *that formed it, Why hast thou made methus?* 2. That God as certainly bears a good-will both to father and son, and will put no hardship upon either. We are sure that God hates nothing that he has made, and therefore (speaking of the adult, who are capable of acting for themselves) he has such a kindness for all souls that none die but through their own default. *All souls are his*, and therefore he is not partial in his judgment of them. Let us subscribe to his interest in us and dominion over us. He says, *All souls are mine*; let us answer, "Lord, my soul is thine; I devote it to thee to be employed for thee and made happy in thee." It is with good reason that God says, "*My son, give me thy heart, for it is my own*," to which we must yield, "*Father, take my heart, it is thy own.*"

[2.] Though God might justify himself by insisting upon his sovereignty, yet he waives that, and lays down the equitable and unexceptionable rule of judgment by which he will proceed as to particular per-

sons; and it is this:—*First*, The sinner that persists in sin shall certainly die, his iniquity shall be his ruin: *The soul that sins shall die*, shall die as a soul can die, shall be excluded from the favour of God, which is the life and bliss of the soul, and shall lie for ever under his wrath, which is its death and misery. Sin is the act of the *soul*, the body being only the *instrument of unrighteousness*; it is called the *sin of the soul*, Mic. vi. 7. And therefore the punishment of sin is the *tribulation and the anguish of the soul*, Rom. ii. 9. *Secondly*, The righteous man that perseveres in his righteousness shall certainly live. *If a man be just*, have a good principle, a good spirit and disposition, and, as an evidence of that, *do judgment and justice (v. 5)*, *he shall surely live, saith the Lord God, v. 9.* He that makes conscience of conforming in every thing to the will of God, that makes it his business to serve God and his aim to glorify God, shall without fail be happy here and for ever in the love and favour of God; and, wherein he comes short of his duty, it shall be forgiven him, through a Mediator. Now here is part of the character of this just man. 1. He is careful to keep himself clean from the pollutions of sin, and at a distance from all the appearances of evil. (1.) From sins against the second commandment. In the matters of God's worship he is jealous, for he knows God is so. He has not only not sacrificed in the high places to the images there set up, but he has not so much as *eaten upon the mountains*, that is, not had any communion with idolaters by *eating things sacrificed to idols*, 1 Cor. x. 20. He would not only not kneel with them at their altars, but not sit with them at their tables in their high places. He detests not only the idols of the heathen but *the idols of the house of Israel*, which were not only allowed of, but generally applauded and adored, by those that were accounted the professing people of God. He has not only not worshipped those idols, but he has not so much as *lifted up his eyes* to them; he has not given them a favourable look, has had no regard at all to them, neither desired their favour nor dreaded their frowns. He has observed so many bewitched by them that he has not dared so much as to look at them, lest he should be taken in the snare. The eyes of idolaters are said to *go a whoring*, Ezek. vi. 9. See Deut. iv. 19. (2.) From sins against the seventh commandment. He is careful to possess his vessel in *sanctification and honour*, and not in the *lusts of uncleanness*; and therefore he has not dared to *defile his neighbour's wife*, nor said or done any thing which had the least tendency to corrupt or debauch her, no, nor will he make any undue approaches to his own wife when she is *put apart for her uncleanness*, for it was forbidden by the law, Lev. xviii. 19; xx. 18. Note, It is an essential branch of wisdom



and justice to keep the appetites of the body always in subjection to reason and virtue. (3.) From sins against the eighth commandment. He is a *just man*, who has not, by fraud and under colour of law and right, *oppressed any*, and who has not with force and arms *spoiled any by violence*, not spoiled them of their goods or estates, much less of their liberties and lives, *v. 7*. Oppression and violence were the sins of the old world, that brought the deluge, and are sins of which still God is and will be the avenger. Nay, he is one that has not lent his money *upon usury*, nor *taken increase* (*v. 8*), though, being done by contract, it may seem free from injustice (*Volenti non fit injuria—What is done to a person with his own consent is no injury to him*), yet, as far as it is forbidden by the law, he dares not do it. A moderate usury they were allowed to receive from strangers, but not from their brethren. A just man will not take advantage of his neighbour's necessity to make a prey of him, nor indulge himself in ease and idleness to live upon the sweat and toil of others, and therefore will not take increase from those who cannot make increase of what he lends them, nor be rigorous in exacting what was agreed for from those who by the act of God are disabled to pay it; but he is willing to share in loss as well as profit. *Qui sentit commodum, sentire debet et onus—He who enjoys the benefit should bear the burden.* 2. He makes conscience of doing the duties of his place. He has *restored the pledge* to the poor debtor, according to the law. Exod. xxii. 26, "*If thou take thy neighbour's raiment for a pledge, the raiment that is for necessary use, thou shalt deliver it to him again, that he may sleep in his own bed-clothes.*" Nay, he has not only restored to the poor that which was their own, but has *given his bread to the hungry*. Observe, It is called *his bread*, because it is honestly come by; that which is given to some is not unjustly taken from others; for God has said, *I hate robbery for burnt-offerings*. Worldly men insist upon it that their bread is *their own*, as Nabal, who therefore would not give of it to David (1 Sam. xxv. 11); yet let them know that it is not so their own but that they are bound to do good to others with it. Clothes are necessary as well as food, and therefore this just man is so charitable as *to cover the naked also with a garment, v. 7*. The coats which Dorcas had made for the poor were produced as witnesses of her charity, Acts ix. 39. This just man has *withdrawn his hands from iniquity, v. 8*. If at any time he has been drawn in through inadvertency to that which afterwards has appeared to him to be a wrong thing, he does not persist in it because he has begun it, but *withdraws his hand* from that which he now perceives to be *iniquity*; for he *executes true judgment between man and man*, according to his opportunity is of doing it (as a judge,

as a witness, as a jurymen, as a referee), and in all commerce is concerned that justice be done, that no man be wronged, that he who is wronged be righted, and that every man have his own, and is ready to interpose himself, and do any good office, in order hereunto. This is his character towards his neighbours; yet it will not suffice that he be just and true to his brother, to complete his character he must be so to his God likewise (*v. 9*): *He has walked in my statutes*, those which relate to the duties of his immediate worship; *he has kept* those and all his other *judgments*, has had respect to them all, has made it his constant care and endeavour to conform and come up to them all, to deal truly, that so he may approve himself faithful to his covenant with God, and, having joined himself to God, he does not treacherously *depart from him*, nor *dissemble with him*. This is a just man, and *living he shall live*; he shall certainly live, shall have life and shall have it more abundantly, shall live truly, live comfortably, live eternally. *Keep the commandments, and thou shalt enter into life*, Matt. xix. 17.

10 If he beget a son *that is* a robber, a shedder of blood, and *that* doeth the like to *any* one of these *things*, 11 And that doeth not any of those *duties*, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour's wife, 12 Hath oppressed the poor and needy, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, 13 Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? He shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him. 14 Now, lo, *if* he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, 15 *That* hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife, 16 Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, *but* hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, 17 *That* hath taken off his hand from the poor, *that* hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not

die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. 18 *As for his father*, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did *that* which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. 19 Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

God, by the prophet, having laid down the general rule of judgment, that he will render eternal life to those that *patiently continue in well-doing*, but indignation and wrath to those that do not *obey the truth*, but *obey unrighteousness* (Rom. ii. 7, 8), comes, in these verses, to show that men's parentage and relation shall not alter the case either one way or other.

I He applies it largely and particularly both ways. As it was in the royal line of the kings of Judah, so it often happens in private families, that godly parents have wicked children and wicked parents have godly children. Now here he shows,

1. That a wicked man shall certainly perish in his iniquity, though he be the son of a pious father. If that righteous man before described *beget a son* whose character is the reverse of his father's, his condition will certainly be so too. (1.) It is supposed as no uncommon case, but a very melancholy one, that the child of a very godly father, notwithstanding all the instructions given him, the good education he has had and the needful rebukes that have been given him, and the restraints he has been laid under, after all the pains taken with him and prayers put up for him, may yet prove notoriously wicked and vile, the grief of his father, the shame of his family, and the curse and plague of his generation. He is here supposed to allow himself in all those enormities which his good father dreaded and carefully avoided, and to shake off all those good duties which his father made conscience of and took satisfaction in; he undoes all that his father did, and goes counter to his example in every thing. He is here described to be a highwayman—a robber and a shedder of blood. He is an idolater: *He has eaten upon the mountains* (v. 11) and has *lifted up his eyes to the idols*, which his good father

never did, and has come at length not only to feast with the idolaters, but to sacrifice with them, which is here called *committing abomination*, for the way of sin is down-hill. He is an adulterer, has *defiled his neighbour's wife*. He is an oppressor even of *the poor and needy*; he robs the spital, and squeezes those who, he knows, cannot defend themselves, and takes a pride and pleasure in trampling upon the weak and impoverishing those that are poor already. He *takes away* from those to whom he should *give*. He has *spoiled by violence* and open force; he has *given forth upon usury*, and so spoiled by contract; and he *has not restored the pledge*, but unjustly detained it even when the debt was paid. Let those good parents that have wicked children not look upon their case as singular; it is a case put here; and by it we see that grace does not run in the blood, nor always attend the means of grace. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, for then the children that are well taught would do well, but God will let us know that his grace is his own and his Spirit a free-agent, and that though we are tied to give our children a good education he is not tied to bless it. In this, as much as any thing, appears the power of original sin and the necessity of special grace. (2.) We are here assured that this wicked man shall perish for ever in his iniquity, notwithstanding his being the son of a good father. He may perhaps prosper awhile in the world, for the sake of the piety of his ancestors, but, having *committed all these abominations*, and never repented of them, *he shall not live*, he shall not be happy in the favour of God; though he may escape the sword of men, he shall not escape the curse of God. *He shall surely die*; he shall be for ever miserable; *his blood shall be upon him*. He may thank himself; he is his own destroyer. And his relation to a good father will be so far from standing him in stead that it will aggravate his sin and his condemnation. It made his sin the more heinous, nay, it made him really the more vile and profligate, and, consequently, will make his misery hereafter the more intolerable.

2. That a righteous man shall be certainly happy, though he be the son of a wicked father. Though the father did eat the sour grapes, if the children do not meddle with them, they shall fare never the worse for that. Here, (1.) It is supposed (and, blessed be God, it is sometimes a case in fact) that the son of an ungodly father may be godly, that, observing how fatal his father's errors were, he may be so wise as to *take warning*, and not tread in his father's steps, v. 14. Ordinarily, children partake of the parents' temper and are drawn in to imitate their example; but here the son, instead of *seeing his father's sins*, and, as is usual, doing the like, sees them and dreads doing the like. *Men indeed do not gather grapes of thorns*, but



God sometimes does, takes a branch from a wild olive and grafts it into a good one. Wicked Ahaz begets a good Hezekiah, who *sees all his father's sins which he has done*, and though he will not, like Ham, proclaim his father's shame, or make the worst of it, yet he loathes it, and blushes at it, and thinks the worse of sin because it was the reproach and ruin of his own father. *He considers and does not such like*; he considers how ill it became his father to do such things, what an offence it was to God and all good men, what a wound and dishonour he got by it, and what calamities he brought into his family, and therefore he *does not such like*. Note, If we did but duly consider the ways of wicked men, we should all dread being associates with them and followers of them. The particulars are here again enumerated almost in the same words with that character given of the just man (v. 6, &c.), to show how good men *walk in the same spirit and in the same steps*. This just man here, when he took care to avoid his father's sins, took care to imitate his grandfather's virtues; and, if we look back, we shall find some examples for our imitation, as well as others for our admonition. This just man can not only say, as the Pharisee, *I am no adulterer, no extortioner, no oppressor, no usurer, no idolater*; but he has *given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked*. He has *taken off his hand from the poor*; where he found his father had put hardships upon poor servants, tenants, neighbours, he eased their burden. He did not say, "What my father has done I will abide by, and if it was a fault it was his and not mine;" as Rehoboam, who contemned the taxes his father had imposed. No; he *takes his hand off from the poor*, and restores them to their rights and liberties again, v. 15—17. Thus he has *executed God's judgments and walked in his statutes*, not only done his duty for once, but gone on in a course and way of obedience. (2.) We are assured that the graceless father alone shall die in his iniquity, but his gracious son shall fare never the worse for it. As for his father (v. 18), because he was a cruel oppressor, and *did hurt*, nay, because, though he had wealth and power, he did not with them do good among his people, lo, *even he*, great as he is, *shall die in his iniquity*, and be undone for ever; but he that kept his integrity *shall surely live*, shall be easy and happy, and he shall *not die for the iniquity of his father*. Perhaps his father's wickedness has lessened his estate and weakened his interest, but it shall be no prejudice at all to his acceptance with God and his eternal welfare.

II. He appeals to themselves then whether they did not wrong God with their proverb. "Thus plain the case is, and yet you say, *Does not the son bear the iniquity of the father?*" No, he does not; he shall not if he will himself *do that which is lawful and right*,"

19 But this people that bore the iniquity

of their fathers had not done that which is lawful and right, and therefore justly suffered for their own sin and had no reason to complain of God's proceedings against them as at all unjust, though they had reason to complain of the bad example their fathers had left them as very unkind. *Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have borne their iniquity*, Lam. v. 7. It is true that there is a curse entailed upon wicked families, but it is as true that the entail may be cut off by repentance and reformation; let the impenitent and unreformed therefore thank themselves if they fall under it. The settled rule of judgment is therefore repeated (v. 20): *The soul that sins shall die*, and not another for it. What direction God has given to earthly judges (Deut. xxiv. 16) he will himself pursue: *The son shall not die, not die eternally, for the iniquity of the father*, if he do not tread in the steps of it, nor the father *for the iniquity of the son*, if he endeavour to do his duty for the preventing of it. *In the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*, which is now clouded and eclipsed, *the righteousness of the righteous shall appear* before all the world to be *upon him*, to his everlasting comfort and honour, upon him as a robe, upon him as a crown; and *the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him*, to his everlasting confusion, upon him as a chain, upon him as a load, as a mountain of lead to sink him to the bottomless pit.

21 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. 22 All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. 23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? 24 But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. 25 Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? 26 When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and

dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. 27 Again, when the wicked *man* turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. 28 Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. 29 Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the LORD is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?

We have here another rule of judgment which God will go by in dealing with us, by which is further demonstrated the equity of his government. The former showed that God will reward or punish according to the change made in the family or succession, for the better or for the worse; here he shows that he will reward or punish according to the change made in the person himself, whether for the better or the worse. While we are in this world we are in a state of probation; the time of trial lasts as long as the time of life, and according as we are found at last it will be with us to eternity. Now see here,

I. The case fairly stated, much as it had been before (*ch.* iii. 18, &c.), and here it is laid down once (*v.* 21—24) and again (*v.* 26—28), because it is a matter of vast importance, a matter of life and death, of life and death eternal. Here we have,

1. A fair invitation given to wicked people, to turn from their wickedness. Assurance is here given us that, *if the wicked will turn*, he shall *surely live*, *v.* 21, 27. Observe,

(1.) What is required to denominate a man a true convert, how he must be qualified that he may be entitled to this act of indemnity. [1.] The first step towards conversion is consideration (*v.* 28): *Because he considers and turns*. The reason why sinners go on in their evil ways is because they do not consider what will be *in the end thereof*; but if the prodigal once *come to himself*, if he sit down and consider a little how bad his state is and how easily it may be bettered, he will soon *return to his father* (Luke xv. 17), and the adulteress to *her first husband* when she considers that *then it was better with her than now*, Hos. ii. 7. [2.] This consideration must produce an aversion to sin. When he considers he must *turn away from his wickedness*, which denotes a change in the disposition of the heart; he must turn from *his sins and his transgressions*, which denotes a change in the life; he must break off from all his evil courses, and wherein he has done iniquity, must resolve to do so no more, and this from a principle of hatred to sin. *What have I to do any more with idols?* [3.] This

aversion to sin must be universal; he must turn from *all* his sins and *all* his transgressions, without a reserve for any Delilah, any house of Rimmon. We do not rightly turn from sin unless we truly hate it, and we do not truly hate sin, as sin, if we do not hate all sin. [4.] This must be accompanied with a conversion to God and duty; he must *keep all God's statutes* (for the obedience, if it be sincere, will be universal) and must *do that which is lawful and right*, that which agrees with the word and will of God, which he must take for his rule, and not the will of the flesh and the way of the world.

(2.) What is promised to those that do thus turn from sin to God. [1.] They shall *save their souls alive*, *v.* 27. They shall *surely live*, *they shall not die*, *v.* 21 and again *v.* 28. Whereas it was said, *The soul that sins it shall die*, yet let not those that have sinned despair but that the threatened death may be prevented if they will but turn and repent in time. When David penitently acknowledges, *I have sinned*, he is immediately assured of his pardon: "*The Lord has taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die* (2 Sam. xii. 13), thou shalt not die eternally." He shall *surely live*; he shall be restored to the favour of God, which is the life of the soul, and shall not lie under *his wrath*, which is as *messengers of death* to the soul. [2.] The sins they have repented of and forsaken shall not rise up in judgment against them, nor shall they be so much as upbraided with them: *All his transgressions that he has committed*, though numerous, though heinous, though very provoking to God, and redounding very much to his dishonour, yet *they shall not be mentioned unto him* (*v.* 22), not mentioned against him; not only they shall not be imputed to him to ruin him, but in the great day they shall not be remembered against him to grieve or shame him; they shall be covered, shall be sought for and not found. This intimates the fulness of pardoning mercy; when sin is forgiven it is *blotted out*, it is *remembered no more*. [3.] In *their righteousness they shall live*; not for their righteousness, as if that were the purchase of their pardon and bliss and an atonement for their sins, but in their righteousness, which qualifies them for all the blessings purchased by the Mediator, and is itself one of those blessings.

(3.) What encouragement a repenting re turning sinner has to hope for pardon and life according to this promise. He is conscious to himself that his obedience for the future can never be a valuable compensation for his former disobedience; but he has this to support himself with, that God's nature, property, and delight, is to have mercy and to forgive, for he has said (*v.* 23): "*Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?* No, by no means; you never had any cause given you to think so." It is true God has determined to punish sinners;



his justice calls for their punishment, and, pursuant to that, impenitent sinners will lie for ever under his wrath and curse; that is the will of his decree, his consequent will, but it is not his antecedent will, the will of his delight. Though the righteousness of his government requires that sinners die, yet the goodness of his nature objects against it. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* It is spoken here comparatively; he has not pleasure in the ruin of sinners, for he would rather they should *turn from their ways and live*; he is better pleased when his mercy is glorified in their salvation than when his justice is glorified in their damnation.

2. A fair warning given to righteous people not to turn from their righteousness, v. 24—26. Here is, (1.) The character of an apostate, that *turns away from his righteousness*. He never was in sincerity a righteous man (as appears by that of the apostle, 1 John ii. 19, *If they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us*), but he passed for a righteous man. He had the denomination and all the external marks of a righteous man; he thought himself one, and others thought him one. But he throws off his profession, leaves his first love, disowns and forsakes the truth and ways of God, and so *turns away from his righteousness* as one sick of it, and now shows, what he always had, a secret aversion to it; and, having *turned away from his righteousness*, he *commits iniquity*, grows loose, and profane, and sensual, intemperate, unjust, and, in short, *does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does*; for, when the unclean spirit recovers his possession of the heart, he *brings with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself and they enter in and dwell there*, Luke xi. 26. (2.) The doom of an apostate: *Shall he live* because he was once a righteous man? No; *factum non dicitur quod non perseverat—that which does not abide is not said to be done*. In his trespass (v. 24) and for his iniquity (that is the meritorious cause of his ruin), *for the iniquity that he has done, he shall die*, shall die eternally, v. 26. *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways*. But will not his former professions and performances stand him in some stead—will they not avail at least to mitigate his punishment? No: *All his righteousness that he has done, though ever so much applauded by men, shall not be mentioned* so as to be either a credit or a comfort to him; the righteousness of an apostate is forgotten, as the wickedness of a penitent is. Under the law, if a Nazarite was polluted he lost all the foregoing days of his separation (Num. vi. 12), so those that have *begun in the spirit and end in the flesh* may reckon all their past services and sufferings *in vain* (Gal. iii. 3, 4); unless we persevere we *lose what we have gained*, 2 John 8.

II. An appeal to the consciences even of the house of Israel, though very corrupt,

concerning God's equity in all these proceedings; for he will be justified, as well as sinners judged, out of their own mouths. 1. The charge they drew up against God is blasphemous, v. 25, 29. *The house of Israel* has the impudence to say, *The way of the Lord is not equal*, than which nothing could be more absurd as well as impious. *He that formed the eye, shall he not see?* Can his ways be unequal whose will is the eternal rule of good and evil, right and wrong? *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* No doubt he shall; he cannot do otherwise. 2. God's reasonings with them are very gracious and condescending, for even these blasphemers God would rather have convinced and saved than condemned. One would have expected that God would immediately vindicate the honour of his justice by making those that impeached it eternal monuments of it. Must those be suffered to draw another breath that have once breathed out such wickedness as this? Shall that tongue ever speak again any where but in hell that has once said, *The ways of the Lord are not equal?* Yes, because this is the day of God's patience, he vouchsafes to argue with them; and he requires them to own, for it is so plain that they cannot deny, (1.) The equity of his ways: *Are not my ways equal?* No doubt they are. He never lays upon man more than is right. In the present punishments of sinners and the afflictions of his own people, yea, and in the eternal damnation of the impenitent, *the ways of the Lord are equal*. (2.) The iniquity of their ways: *"Are not your ways unequal?"* It is plain that they are, and the troubles you are in you have brought upon your own heads. God does you no wrong, but you have wronged yourselves." *The foolishness of man perverts his way*, makes that unequal, and then *his heart frets against the Lord*, as if his ways were unequal, Prov. xix. 3. In all our disputes with God, and in all his controversies with us, it will be found that his ways are equal, but ours are unequal, that he is in the right and we are in the wrong.

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye.

We have here the conclusion and application of this whole matter. After a fair trial at the bar of right reason the verdict is brought in on God's side; it appears that *his*



*ways are equal.* Judgment therefore is next to be given; and one would think it should be a judgment of condemnation, nothing short of *Go, you cursed, into everlasting fire.* But, behold, a miracle of mercy; the day of grace and divine patience is yet lengthened out; and therefore, though God will at last judge *every one according to his ways*, yet he waits to be gracious, and closes all with a call to repentance and a promise of pardon upon repentance.

I. Here are four necessary duties that we are called to, all amounting to the same:—

1. We must repent; we must change our mind and change our ways; we must be sorry for what we have done amiss and ashamed of it, and go as far as we can towards the undoing of it again. 2. We must *turn ourselves from all our transgressions*, v. 30 and again v. 32. *Turn yourselves*, face about; turn from sin, nay, turn against it as the enemy you loathe, turn to God as the friend you love. 3. We must *cast away from us all our transgressions*; we must abandon and forsake them with a resolution never to return to them again, give sin a bill of divorce, break all the leagues we have made with it, throw it overboard, as the mariners did Jonah (for it has raised the storm), cast it out of the soul, and crucify it as a malefactor. 4. We must *make us a new heart and a new spirit*. This was the matter of a promise, ch. xi. 19. Here it is the matter of a precept. We must do our endeavour, and then God will not be wanting to us to give us his grace. St. Austin well explains this precept. *Deus non jubet impossibilia, sed jubendo monet et facere quod possis et petere quod non possis*—God does not enjoin impossibilities, but by his commands admonishes us to do what is in our power and to pray for what is not.

II. Here are four good arguments used to enforce these calls to repentance:—1. It is the only way, and it is a sure way, to prevent the ruin which our sins have a direct tendency to: *So iniquity shall not be your ruin*, which implies that, if we do not repent, iniquity will be our ruin, here and for ever, but that, if we do, we are safe, we are snatched as brands out of the burning. 2. If we repent not, we certainly perish, and our blood will be upon our own heads. *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* What an absurd thing it is for you to choose death and damnation rather than life and salvation. Note, The reason why sinners die is because they *will die*; they will go down the way that leads to death, and not come up to the terms on which life is offered. Herein sinners, especially sinners of the house of Israel, are most unreasonable and act most unaccountably. 3. The God of heaven has no delight in our ruin, but desires our welfare (v. 32): *I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies*, which implies that he has pleasure in the recovery of those that repent; and this is both an engagement and an en-

couragement to us to repent. 4. We are made for ever if we repent: *Turn yourselves, and live.* He that says to us, *Repent*, thereby says to us, *Live*, yea, he says to us, *Live*; so that life and death are here set before us.

## CHAP. XIX.

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of the 17th, to foretell and lament the ruin of the house of David, the royal family of Judah, in the calamitous exit of the four sons and grandsons of Josiah—Jehoshaphat, Jeholekiah, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, in whom that illustrious line of kings was cut off, which the prophet is here ordered to lament, ver. 1. And he does it by similitudes. 1. The kingdom of Judah and house of David are here compared to a lioness, and those princes to lions, that were fierce and ravenous, but were hunted down and taken in nets, ver. 2–9. 11. That kingdom and that house are here compared to a vine, and these princes to branches, which had been strong and flourishing, but were now broken off and burnt, ver. 10–14. This ruin of that monarchy was now in the doing, and this lamentation of it was intended to affect the people with it, that they might not flatter themselves with vain hopes of the lengthening out of their tranquillity.

**M**OREOVER take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, 2 And say, What *is* thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions. 3 And she brought up one of her whelps: it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men. 4 The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt. 5 Now when she saw that she had waited, *and* her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, *and* made him a young lion. 6 And he went up and down among the lions, he became a young lion, and learned to catch the prey, *and* devoured men. 7 And he knew their desolate palaces, and he laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, by the noise of his roaring. 8 Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit. 9 And they put him in ward in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon: they brought him into holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel.

Here are, I. Orders given to the prophet to bewail the fall of the royal family, which had long made so great a figure by virtue of a covenant of royalty made with David and his seed, so that the eclipsing and extinguishing of it are justly lamented by all who know what value to put upon the *covenant of our God*, as we find, after a very large account of that covenant with David (Ps. lxxxix. 3, 20, &c.), a sad lamentation for the decays and desolations of his family (v. 38, 39):



But thou hast cast off and abhorred, hast made void the covenant of thy servant and profaned his crown, &c. The kings of Judah are here called *princes of Israel*; for their glory was diminished and they had become but as princes, and their purity was lost; they had become corrupt and idolatrous as the *kings of Israel*, whose ways they had learned. The prophet must *take up a lamentation* for them; that is, he must describe their lamentable fall as one that did himself lay it to heart, and desired that those he preached and wrote to might do so to. And how can we expect that others should be affected with that which we ourselves are not affected with? Ministers, when they boldly foretel, must yet bitterly lament the destruction of sinners, as those that have not desired the *woeful day*. He is not directed to give advice to the princes of Israel (that had been long and often done in vain), but, the decree having gone forth, he must *take up a lamentation* for them.

II. Instructions given him what to say.

1. He must compare the kingdom of Judah to a *lioness*, so wretchedly degenerated was it from what it had been formerly, when it sat as a queen among the nations, v. 2. *What is thy mother?* thine, O king? (we read of Solomon's crown wherewith his mother crowned him, that is, his people, Cant. iii. 11), thine, O Judah? The royal family is as a mother to the kingdom, a nursing mother. She is a *lioness*, fierce, and cruel, and ravenous. When they had left their divinity they soon lost their humanity too; and, when they *feared not God*, neither did they *regard man*. She *lay down among lions*. God had said, *The people shall dwell alone, but they mingled with the nations and learned their works*. She *nourished her whelps among young lions*, taught the young princes the way of tyrants, which was then used by the arbitrary kings of the east, filled their heads betimes with notions of their absolute despotic power, and possessed them with a belief that they had a right to enslave their subjects, that their liberty and property lay at their mercy: thus *she nourished her whelps among young lions*. 2. He must compare the kings of Judah to *lions' whelps*, v. 3. Jacob had compared Judah, and especially the house of David, to a *lion's whelp*, for its being strong and formidable to its enemies abroad (Gen. xlix. 9, *He is an old lion; who shall stir him up?*) and, if they had adhered to the divine law and promise, God would have preserved to them the might, and majesty, and dominion of a lion, and does it in Christ, the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*. But these *lions' whelps* were so to their own subjects, were cruel and oppressive to them, preyed upon their estates and liberties; and, when they thus by their tyranny made themselves a terror to those whom they ought to have protected, it was just with God to make those a terror to them whom otherwise they might have subdued. Here is lamented, (1.) The

sin and fall of Jehoahaz, one of the whelps of this lioness. He *became a young lion* (v. 3); he was made king, and thought he was made so that he might do what he pleased, and gratify his own ambition, covetousness, and revenge, as he had a mind; and so he was soon master of all the arts of tyranny; he *learned to catch the prey and devoured men*. When he got power into his hand, all that had before in any thing disobliged him were made to feel his resentments and become a sacrifice to his rage. But what came of it? He did not prosper long in his tyranny: *The nations heard of him* (v. 4), heard how furiously he drove at his first coming to the crown, how he trampled upon all that is just and sacred, and violated all his engagements, so that they looked upon him as a dangerous neighbour, and prosecuted him accordingly, *as a multitude of shepherds is called forth against a lion roaring on his prey*, Isa. xxxi.

4. And he was taken, as a beast of prey, in *their pit*. His own subjects durst not stand up in defence of their liberties, but God raised up a foreign power that soon put an end to his tyranny, and *brought him in chains to the land of Egypt*. Thither Jehoahaz was carried captive, and never heard of more. (2.) The like sin and fall of his successor Jehoiakim. The *kingdom of Judah* for some time expected the return of Jehoahaz out of Egypt, but at length despaired of it, and then *took another of the lion's whelps*, and *made him a young lion*, v. 5. And he, instead of taking warning by his brother's fate to use his power with equity and moderation, and to seek the good of his people, trod in his brother's steps: *He went up and down among the lions*, v. 6. He consulted and conversed with those that were fierce and furious like himself, and took his measures from them, as Rehoboam took the advice of the rash and hot-headed young men. And he soon learned *to catch the prey, and he devoured men* (v. 6); he seized his subjects' estates, fined and imprisoned them, filled his treasury by rapine and injustice, sequestrations and confiscations, fines and forfeitures, and swallowed up all that stood in his way. He had got the art of discovering what effects men had that lay concealed, and where the treasures were which they had hoarded up; he *knew their desolate places* (v. 7), where they hid their money and sometimes hid themselves, he knew where to find both out; and by his oppression he *laid waste their cities*, depopulated them by forcing the inhabitants to remove their families to some place of safety. *The land was desolate*, and the country villages were deserted; and though there was great plenty, and a fulness of all good things, yet people quitted it all for fear of *the noise of his roaring*. He took a pride in making all his subjects afraid of him, as the lion makes all the beasts of the forest to tremble (Amos iii. 8), and by his terrible roaring so astonished them that they fell down for fear,



and, having not spirit to make their escape, became an easy prey to him, as they say the lions do. He hectorcd, and threatened, and talked big, and bullied people out of what they had. Thus he thought to establish his own power, but it had a contrary effect, it did but hasten his own ruin (v. 8): *The nations set against him on every side*, to restrain and reduce his exorbitant power, which they joined in confederacy to do for their common safety; and *they spread their net over him*, formed designs against him. God brought against Jehoiakim bands of the Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites, with the Chaldees (2 Kings xxiv. 2), and he was *taken in their pit*. *Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon*, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6. They put this lion within grates, bound him in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon, v. 9. What became of him we know not; but *his voice was nowhere heard roaring upon the mountains of Israel*. There was an end of his tyranny: he was *buried with the burial of an ass* (Jer. xxii. 19), though he had been as a lion, *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*. Note, The righteousness of God is to be acknowledged when those who have terrified and enslaved others are themselves terrified and enslaved, when those who by the abuse of their power to destruction which was given them for edification make themselves as wild beasts, as *roaring lions and ranging bears* (for such, Solomon says, *wicked rulers are over the poor people*, Prov. xxviii. 15), are treated as such—when those who, like Ishmael, have their *hand against every man*, come at last to have *every man's hand against them*. It was long since observed that bloody tyrants seldom die in peace, but have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy.

Ad generum Cereris sine cæde et sanguine pauci  
Descendunt reges et siccâ morte tyranni—  
How few of all the boastful men that reign  
Descend in peace to Pluto's dark domain!

JUVENAL.

10 Thy mother *is like a vine in thy blood*, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. 11 And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches. 12 But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. 13 And now she *is planted in the wilderness*, in a dry and thirsty ground. 14 And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches,

*which hath devoured her fruit*, so that she hath no strong rod *to be a sceptre to rule*. This *is a lamentation*, and shall be for a lamentation.

Jerusalem, the mother-city, is here represented by another similitude; she is a vine, and the princes are her branches. This comparison we had before, *ch. xv.* 1. Jerusalem is as a vine; the Jewish nation is so: *Like a vine in thy blood* (v. 10), the blood-royal, like a vine set in blood and watered with blood, which contributes very much to the flourishing and fruitfulness of vines, as if the blood which had been shed had been designed for the fattening and improving of the soil, in such plenty was it shed; and for a time it seemed to have that effect, for she was *fruitful and full of branches* by reason of the waters, the *many waters* near which she was *planted*. Places of great wickedness may prosper for a while; and a vine set in blood may be full of branches. Jerusalem was full of able magistrates, men of sense, men of learning and experience, that were *strong rods*, branches of this vine of uncommon bulk and strength, or poles for the support of this vine, for such magistrates are. The boughs of this vine had grown to such maturity that they were fit to make white staves of for *the sceptres of those that bore rule*, v. 11. And those are *strong rods* that are fit for *sceptres*, men of strong judgments and strong resolutions that are fit for magistrates. When the royal family of Judah was numerous, and the courts of justice were filled with men of sense and probity, then *Jerusalem's stature was exalted among thick branches*; when the government is in good able hands a nation is thereby made considerable. Then she was not taken for a weak and lowly vine, but she *appeared in her height*, a distinguished city, *with the multitude of her branches*. *Tanquam lenta solent inter viburna cupressi*—*Midst humble withies thus the cypress soars*. "*In thy quietness*" (so some read that, v. 10, which we translate *in thy blood*) "*thou wast such a vine as this*." When Zedekiah was quiet and easy under the king of Babylon's yoke his kingdom flourished thus. See how slow God is to anger, how he defers his judgments, and waits to be gracious. 2. This vine is now quite destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar, being highly provoked by Zedekiah's treachery, *plucked it up in fury* (v. 12), ruined the city and kingdom, and cut off all the branches of the royal family that fell in his way. The vine was *cut off close to the ground*, though not plucked up by the roots. The *east wind dried up the fruit* that was blasted. The young people fell by the sword, or were carried into captivity. The aspect of it had nothing that was pleasing, the prospect nothing that was promising. Her *strong rods were broken and withered*; her great men were cut off, judges and magistrates deposed. *The vine itself is planted in the wilderness*, v. 13. Babylon



was as a wilderness to those of the people that were carried captives thither; the land of Judah was as a wilderness to Jerusalem, now that the whole country was ravaged and laid waste by the Chaldean army—a *fruitful land turned into barrenness*. "It is burnt with fire (Ps. lxxx. 16) and that fire has gone out of a rod of her branches (v. 14); the king himself, by rebelling against the king of Babylon, has given occasion to all this mischief. She may thank herself for the fire that consumes her; she has by her wickedness made herself like tinder to the sparks of God's wrath, so that her own branches serve as fuel for her own consumption; in them the fire is kindled which devoured the fruit, the sins of the elder being the judgments which destroy the younger; her fruit is burned with her own branches, so that she has no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule, none to be found now that are fit for the government or dare take this ruin under their hand, as the complaint is (Isa. iii. 6, 7), none of the house of David left that have a right to rule, no wise men, or men of sense, that are able to rule." It goes ill with any state, and is likely to go worse, when it is thus deprived of the blessings of government and has no strong rods for sceptres. Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is a child, for it is as well to have no rod as not a strong rod. Those strong rods, we have reason to fear, had been instruments of oppression, assistant to the king in catching the prey and devouring men, and now they are destroyed with him. Tyranny is the inlet to anarchy; and, when the rod of government is turned into the serpent of oppression, it is just with God to say, "There shall be no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule; but let men be as are the fishes of the sea, where the greater devour the less." Note, This is a lamentation and shall be for a lamentation. The prophet was bidden (v. 1) to take up a lamentation; and, having done so, he leaves it to be made use of by others. "It is a lamentation to us of this age, and, the desolations continuing long, it shall be for a lamentation to those that shall come after us; the child unborn will rue the destruction made of Judah and Jerusalem by the present judgments. They were a great while in coming; the bow was long in the drawing; but now that they have come they will continue, and the sad effects of them will be entailed upon posterity." Note, Those who fill up the measure of their fathers' sins are laying up in store for their children's sorrows and furnishing them with matter for lamentation; and nothing is more so than the overthrow of government.

#### CHAP. XX.

In this chapter, I. The prophet is consulted by some of the elders of Israel, ver. 1. II. He is instructed by his God what answer to give them. He must, 1. Signify God's displeasure against them, ver. 2, 3. And, 2. He must show them what just cause he had for that displeasure, by giving them a history of God's grateful dealings with their fathers and their treacherous dealings with God. (1.) In Egypt, ver. 5-9. (2.) In the wilderness, ver. 10-20. (3.) In Canaan, ver. 21-32. 3. He must denounce the judgments of

God against them, ver. 33-36. 4. He must tell them likewise what mercy God had in store for them, when he would bring a remnant of them to repentance, re-establish them in their own land, and set up his sanctuary among them again, ver. 37-44. 5. Here is another word dropped towards Jerusalem, which is explained and enlarged upon in the next chapter, ver. 45-49.

AND it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the LORD, and sat before me. 2 Then came the word of the LORD unto me, saying, 3 Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you. 4 Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them? cause them to know the abominations of their fathers:

Here is, 1. The occasion of the message which we have in this chapter. That sermon which we had ch. xviii. was occasioned by their presumptuous reflections upon God; this was occasioned by their hypocritical enquiries after him. Each shall have his own. This prophecy is exactly dated, in the seventh year of the captivity, about two years after Ezekiel began to prophesy. God would have them to keep account how long their captivity lasted, that they might see how the years went on towards their deliverance, though very slowly. Certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the Lord, not stately (as those ch. viii. 1), but, as it should seem, occasionally, and upon a particular emergency. Whether they were of those that were now in captivity, or elders lately come from Jerusalem upon business to Babylon, is not certain; but, by what the prophet says to them (v. 32), it should seem, their enquiry was whether now that they were captives in Babylon, at a distance from their own country, where they had not only no temple, but no synagogue, for the worship of God, it was not lawful for them, that they might ingratiate themselves with their lords and masters, to join with them in their worship and do as the families of these countries do, that serve wood and stone. This matter was palliated as well as it would bear, like Naaman's pleading with Elisha for leave to bow in the house of Rimmon, in compliment to the king; but we have reason to suspect that their enquiry drove at this. Note, Those hearts are wretchedly hardened which ask God leave to go on in sin, and that when they are suffering for it. They came and sat very demurely and with a show of devotion before the prophet, ch. xxxiii. 31. 2. The purport of this message. (1.) They must be made to know that God is angry with them; he takes it as an affront that they come to enquire of him when they are resolved to go on still in their trespasses:



*As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you, v. 3.* Their shows of devotion shall be neither acceptable to God nor advantageous to themselves. God will not take notice of their enquiries, nor give them any satisfactory answers. Note, A hypocritical attendance on God and his ordinances is so far from being pleasing to him that it is provoking. (2.) They must be made to know that God is justly angry with them (v. 4): "*Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them?* Thou art a prophet, surely thou wilt not *plead for them*, as an intercessor with God; but surely thou wilt *pass sentence* on them as a judge for God. *See, I have set thee over the nation;* wilt thou not declare to them the judgments of the Lord? Cause them therefore to *know the abominations of their fathers.*" So the orders run now, as before (ch. xvi. 2) he must cause them to *know their own abominations*. Though their own abominations were sufficient to justify God in the severest of his proceedings against them, yet it would be of use for them to know the *abominations of their fathers*, that they might see what a righteous thing it was with God now at last to cut them off from being a people, who from the first were such a provoking people.

5 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, *I am the Lord your God*; 6 In the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which *is* the glory of all lands: 7 Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: *I am the Lord your God.* 8 But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. 9 But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they *were*, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in

bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.

The history of the ingratitude and rebellion of the people of Israel here begins as early as their beginning; so does the history of man's apostasy from his Maker. No sooner have we read the story of our first parents' creation than we immediately meet with that of their rebellion; so we see here it was with Israel, a people designed to represent the body of mankind both in their dealings with God and in his with them. Here is,

1. The gracious purposes of God's law concerning Israel in Egypt, where they were bond-slaves to Pharaoh. Be it spoken, be it written, to the immortal honour of free grace, that then and there, 1. He chose Israel to be a peculiar people to himself, though their condition was bad and their character worse, that he might have the honour of mending both. He *therefore* chose them, because they were *the seed of the house of Jacob*, the posterity of that prince with God, *that he might keep the oath which he had sworn unto their fathers*, Deut. vii. 7, 8. 2. He *made himself known to them* by his name *Jehovah* (a new name, Exod. vi. 3), when by reason of their servitude they had almost lost the knowledge of that name by which he was known to their fathers, *God Almighty*. Note, As the foundation of our blessedness is laid in God's choosing us, so the first step towards it is God's making himself known to us. And whatever distance we are at, whatever distress we are in, he that made himself known to Israel even in the land of Egypt can find us out, and follow us with the gracious discoveries and manifestations of his favour. 3. He made over himself to them as their God in covenant: *I lifted up my hand unto them*, saying it, and confirming it with an oath, "*I am the Lord your God*, to whom you are to pay your homage, and from whom and in whom you are to expect your bliss." 4. He promised to bring them out of Egypt; and made good what he promised. He *lifted up his hand*, that is, he swore unto them, that he would deliver them; and, they being very unworthy, and their deliverance very unlikely, it was requisite that the promise of it should be *confirmed by an oath*. Or, He *lifted up his hand*, that is, he put forth his almighty power to do it; he did it with an *outstretched arm*, Ps. cxxxvi. 12. 5. He assured them that he would put them in possession of the land of Canaan. He *therefore* brought them out of Egypt, *that he might bring them into a land that he had espied out for them*, a second garden of Eden, which was *the glory of all lands*. So he found it, the climate being temperate, the soil fruitful, the situation pleasant, and every thing agreeable (Deut. viii. 7; xi. 12); or, however this might be, so he made it, b. setting up his sanctuary in it



II. The reasonable commands he gave them, and the easy conditions of his covenant with them at that time. Having told them what they might expect from him, he next tells them what was all he expected from them; it was no more than this (v. 7): "*Cast you away every man his images that he uses for worship, that are the adorations, but should be the abominations, of his eyes. Let him abominate them, and put them out of his sight, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt.*" Of these, it seems, many of them were fond; the golden calf was one of them. It was just, and what might reasonably be expected, that, being delivered from the Egyptian slavery, they should quit the Egyptian idolatry, especially when God, at bringing them out, *executed judgment upon the gods of Egypt* (Num. xxxiii. 4) and thereby showed himself above them. And, whatever other idols they might have an inclination to, one would think they should have had a rooted aversion to the gods of Egypt for Egypt's sake, which had been to them a house of bondage. Yet, it seems, they needed this caution, and it is backed with a good reason: *I am the Lord your God*, who neither need an assistant nor will admit a rival.

III. Their unreasonable disobedience to these commands, for which God might justly have cut them off as soon as ever they were formed into a people (v. 8): *They rebelled against God*, not only refused to comply with his particular precepts, but shook off their allegiance, and in effect told him that they would be at liberty to worship what God they pleased. And even then when God came down to deliver them, and sent Moses for that purpose, yet they would not *forsake the idols of Egypt*, which perhaps made them speak so affectionately of the *onions of Egypt* (Num. xi. 5), for among other things the Egyptians worshipped an onion. It was strange that all the plagues of Egypt would not prevail to cure them of their affection to the *idols of Egypt*. For this God said he would *pour out his fury upon them*, even while they were yet *in the midst of the land of Egypt*. Justly might he have said, "*Let them die with the Egyptians.*" This magnifies the riches of God's goodness, that he was pleased to work so great a salvation for them even when he saw them ripe for ruin. Well might Moses tell them, *It is not for your righteousness*, Deut. ix. 4, 5.

IV. The wonderful deliverance which God wrought for them, notwithstanding. Though they forfeited the favour while it was in the bestowing, and when God *would have healed them* then their *iniquity was discovered* (Hos. vii. 1), yet *mercy rejoiced against judgment*, and God did what he designed purely *for his own name's sake*, v. 9. When nothing in us will furnish him with a reason for his favours he furnishes himself with one. God *made himself known to them in the sight of*

*the heathen* when he ordered Moses publicly to say to Pharaoh, *Israel is my son, my first-born*, let them go, *that they may serve me*. Now, if he had left them to perish for their wickedness as they deserved, the Egyptians would have reflected upon him for it, and his name would have been polluted, which ought to be sanctified and shall be so. Note, The church is secured, even when it is corrupt, because God will secure his own honour.

10 Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness.

11 And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them.

12 Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that *I am* the LORD that sanctify them.

13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness to consume them.

14 But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.

15 Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given *them*, flowing with milk and honey, which *is* the glory of all lands;

16 Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.

17 Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness.

18 But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols:

19 *I am* the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them;

20 And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that *I am* the LORD your God.

21 Notwithstanding the children rebelled

against me : they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them ; they polluted my sabbaths : then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. 22 Nevertheless I withdrew mine hand and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth. 23 I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries ; 24 Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. 25 Wherefore I gave them also statutes *that were* not good, and judgments whereby they should not live ; 26 And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through *the fire* all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I *am* the LORD.

The history of the struggle between the sins of Israel, by which they endeavoured to ruin themselves, and the mercies of God, by which he endeavoured to save them and make them happy, is here continued : and the instances of that struggle in these verses have reference to what passed between God and them in the wilderness, in which God honoured himself and they shamed themselves. The story of Israel in the wilderness is referred to in the New Testament (1 Cor. x. and Heb. iii.), as well as often in the Old, for warning to us Christians ; and therefore we are particularly concerned in these verses. Observe,

I. The great things God did for them, which he puts them in mind of, not as grudging them his favours, but to show how ungrateful they had been. And we say, If you call a man ungrateful, you can call him no worse. It was a great favour, 1. That God brought them forth out of Egypt (v. 10), though, as it follows, he brought them into the wilderness and not into Canaan immediately. It is better to be at liberty in a wilderness than bond-slaves in a land of plenty, to enjoy God and ourselves in solitude than to lose both in a crowd ; yet there were many of them who had such base servile spirits as not to understand this, but, when they met with the difficulties of a desert,

wished themselves in Egypt again. 2. That he gave them the law upon Mount Sinai (v. 11), not only instructed them concerning good and evil, but by his authority bound them from the evil and to the good. He gave them his statutes, and a valuable gift it was. Moses commanded them a law that was the inheritance of the congregation of Israel, Deut. xxxiii. 4. God made them to know his judgments, not only enacted laws for them, but showed them the reasonableness and equity of those laws, with what judgment they were formed. The laws he gave them they were encouraged to observe and obey ; for, *if a man do them, he shall even live in them* ; in keeping God's commandments there is abundance of comfort and a great reward. Christ says, *If thou wilt into enter life, and enjoy it, keep the commandments*. Though those who are the most strict in their obedience are thus far unprofitable servants that they do no more than is their duty to do, yet it is thus richly recompensed : *This do, and thou shalt live*. The Chaldee says, *He shall live an eternal life in them*. St. Paul quotes this (Gal. iii. 12) to show that *the law is not of faith*, but proposes life upon condition of perfect obedience, which we are not capable of rendering, and therefore must have recourse to the grace of the gospel, without which we are all undone. 3. That he revived the ancient institution of the sabbath day, which was lost and forgotten while they were bond-slaves in Egypt ; for their task-masters there would by no means allow them to rest one day in seven. In the wilderness indeed every day was a day of rest ; for what need had those to labour who lived upon manna, and whose raiment waxed not old ? But one day in seven must be a holy rest (v. 12) : *I gave them my sabbaths to be a sign between me and them* (the institution of the sabbath was a sign of God's good-will to them, and their observance of it a sign of their regard to him), *that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them*. By this God made it to appear that he had distinguished them from the rest of the world and designed to model them for a peculiar people to himself ; and by their attendance on God in solemn assemblies on sabbath days they were made to increase in the knowledge of God, in an experimental knowledge of the powers and pleasures of his sanctifying grace. Note, (1.) Sabbaths are privileges, and are so to be accounted ; the church acknowledges as a great favour, in that chapter which is parallel to this (Neh. ix. 14), *Thou madest known unto them thy holy sabbaths*. (2.) Sabbaths are signs ; it is a sign that men have a sense of religion, and that there is some good correspondence between them and God, when they make conscience of keeping holy the sabbath day. (3.) Sabbaths, if duly sanctified, are the means of our sanctification ; if we do the



duty of the day, we shall find, to our comfort, *it is the Lord that sanctifies us*, makes us holy (that is, truly happy) here, and prepares us to be happy (that is, perfectly holy) hereafter.

II. Their disobedient undutiful conduct towards God, for which he might justly have thrown them out of covenant as soon as he had taken them into covenant (v. 13): *They rebelled in the wilderness*. There where they received so much mercy from God, and had such a dependence upon him, and were in their way to Canaan, yet there they broke out in many open rebellions against the God that led them and fed them. They did not only not *walk in God's statutes*, but they *despised his judgments* as not worth observing; instead of sanctifying the sabbaths, they polluted them, greatly polluted them; one gathered sticks, many went out to gather manna on this day. Hereupon God was ready sometimes to cut them off; he said, more than once, that he would *consume them in the wilderness*. But Moses interceded, so did God's own mercy more powerfully, and most of all a concern for his own glory, that *his name might not be polluted and profaned among the heathen* (v. 14), that the Egyptians might not say that for mischief he brought them thus far, or that he was not able to bring them any further, or that he had no such good land as was talked of to bring them to, Exod. xxxii. 12; Num. xiv. 13, &c. Note, God's strongest reasons for his sparing mercy are those which are fetched from his own glory.

III. God's determination to cut off that generation of them in the wilderness. He who *lifted up his hand* for them (v. 6) now *lifted up his hand against them*; he who by an oath confirmed his promise to bring them out of Egypt now by an oath confirmed his threatenings that he would not bring them into Canaan (v. 15, 16): *I lifted up my hand unto them, saying, As truly as I live, these men who have tempted me these ten times shall never see the land which I swore unto their fathers*, Num. xiv. 22, 23; Ps. xcv. 11. By their contempt of God's laws, and particularly of his sabbaths, they put a bar in their own door; and that which was at the bottom of their disobedience to God, and their neglect of his institutions, was a secret affection to the gods of Egypt: *Their heart went after their idols*. Note, The bias of the mind towards the world and the flesh, the money and the belly (those two great objects of spiritual idolatry), is the root of bitterness from which springs all disobedience to the divine law. The heart that goes after those idols despises God's judgments.

IV. The reservation of a seed that should be admitted upon a new trial, and the instructions given to that seed, v. 17. Though they thus deserved ruin, and were doomed to it, yet *my eye spared them*. When he looked upon them he had compassion on

them, and did not *make an end of them*, but reprieved them till a new generation was reared. Note, It is owing purely to the mercy of God that he has not long ago *made an end of us*. 'This new generation is well educated. Moses in Deuteronomy reported and enforced the laws which had been given to those that came out of Egypt, that their children might have them as it were sounding in their ears afresh when they entered Canaan (v. 18): *"I said unto their children in the wilderness, in the plains of Moab, Walk in the statutes of your God and walk not in the statutes of your fathers; do not imitate their superstitious usages nor retain their foolish wicked customs; away with their vain conversation, which has nothing else to say for itself but that it was received by the tradition of your fathers,"* 1 Pet. i. 18. *Defile not yourselves with their idols*, for you see how odious they rendered themselves to God by them. But *keep my judgments and hallow my sabbaths*," v. 19, 20. Note, If parents be careless, and do not give their children good instructions as they ought, the children ought to make up the want by studying the word of God so much the more carefully and diligently themselves when they grow up; and the bad examples of parents must be made use of by their children for admonition, and not for imitation.

V. The revolt of the next generation from God, by which they also made themselves obnoxious to the wrath of God (v. 21): *The children rebelled against me too*. And the same that was said of the fathers' rebellion is here said of the children's, for they were a seed of evil-doers. Moses told them that he *knew their rebellion and their stiff neck*, Deut. xxxi. 27. And Deut. ix. 24, *You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you. They walked not in my statutes* (v. 21); nay, *they despised my statutes*, v. 24. Those who disobey God's statutes despise them, they show that they have a mean opinion of them and of him whose statutes they are. *They polluted God's sabbaths*, as their fathers. Note, The profanation of the sabbath day is an inlet to all impiety; those who pollute holy time will keep nothing pure. It was said of the fathers (v. 16) that *their heart went after their idols*; they worshipped idols because they had an affection for them. It is said of the children (v. 24) that *their eyes went after their fathers' idols*; they had grown atheistical, and had no affection for any gods at all, but they worshipped *their fathers' idols* because they were their fathers' and they had them before their eyes. They were used to them; and, if they must have gods, they would have such as they could see, such as they could manage. And that which aggravated their disobedience to God's statutes was that, *if they had done them, they might have lived in them* (v. 21), might have been a happy thriving people. Note, Those that

go contrary to their duty go contrary to their interest; they will not obey, will not come to Christ, that they may have life, John v. 40. And it is therefore just that those who will not live and flourish as they might in their obedience should die and perish in their disobedience. Now the great instance of that generation's rebellion and inclination to idolatry was the *iniquity of Peor*, as that of their fathers was the *golden calf*. Then *the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel*, Num. xxv. 3. Then there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, which, if it had not been seasonably stayed by Phinehas's zeal, had cut them all off; and yet they owned, in Joshua's time, *We are not cleansed from that iniquity unto this day*, Josh. xxii. 17; Ps. cvi. 29. Then it was that God said he would *pour out his fury upon them* (v. 21), that he *lifted up his hand unto them in the wilderness*, when they were a second time just ready to enter Canaan, *that he would scatter them among the heathen*. This very thing he said to them by Moses in his parting song, Deut. xxxii. 20. Because they *provoked him to jealousy with strange gods*, he said, *I will hide my face from them*; and (v. 26, 27) he said, *I would scatter them into corners, were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy*, which explains this (v. 21, 22), *I said I would pour out my fury upon them*, but *I withdrew my hand for my name's sake*. Note, When the corruptions of the visible church are such, and so provoking, that we have reason to fear its total extirpation, yet then we may be confident of this, to our comfort, that God will secure his own honour, by making good his purpose, that while the world stands he will have a church in it.

VI. The judgments of God upon them for their rebellion. They would not regard the statutes and judgments by which God prescribed them their duty, but despised them, and therefore God *gave them statutes and judgments which were not good, and by which they should not live*, v. 25. By this we may understand the several ways by which God punished them while they were in the wilderness—the plague that broke in upon them, the fiery serpent, and the like—which, in allusion to the law they had broken, are called *judgments*, because inflicted by the justice of God, and *statutes*, because he gave orders concerning them and commanded desolations as sometimes he had commanded deliverances, and appointed Israel's plagues as he had done the plagues of Egypt. When God said, *I will consume them in a moment* (Num. xvi. 21), when he said, *Take the heads of the people and hang them up* (Num. xxv. 4), when he threatened them with the curse and obliged them to say *Amen* to every curse (Deut. xxvii. 28), then he gave them judgments by which they should not live. More is implied than is expressed; they are judgments by which they should

die. Those that will not be bound by the precepts of the law shall be bound by the sentence of it; for one way or other the word of God will *take hold* of men, Zech. i. 6. Spiritual judgments are the most dreadful; and these God punished them with. The statutes and judgments which the heathen observed in the worship of their idols were not good, and in practising them they could not live; and God gave them up to those. He made their sin to be their punishment, gave them up to a *reprobate mind*, as he did the Gentile idolaters (Rom. i. 24, 26), gave them up to their own heart's lusts (Ps. lxxxii. 12), punished them for those superstitious customs which were against the written law by giving them up to those which were against the very light and law of nature; he left them to themselves to be guilty of the most impure idolatries, as in the worship of Baal-peor (he *polluted them*, that is, he permitted them to pollute themselves, *in their own gifts*, v. 26), and of the most barbarous idolatries, as in the worship of Moloch, when they *caused their children*, especially their first-born, which God challenged a particular property in (*the first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me*), to pass through the fire, to be sacrificed to their idols; that thus he might *make them desolate*, not only that he might justly do it, but that he might do it by their own hands; for this must needs be a great weakening to their families and a diminution of the honour and strength of their country. Note, God sometimes makes sin to be its own punishment, and yet is not the author of sin; and there needs no more to make men miserable than to give them up to their own vile appetites and passions. Let them be put into the hand of their own counsels, and they will ruin themselves and make themselves desolate. And thus God makes them know that he is the Lord, and that he is a righteous God, which they themselves will be compelled to own when they see how much their wilful transgressions contribute to their own desolations. Note, Those who will not acknowledge God as the Lord their ruler shall be made to acknowledge him as the Lord their judge when it is too late.

27 Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me. 28 For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented



the provocation of their offering: there also they made their sweet savour, and poured out there their drink-offerings. 29 Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go? and the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day. 30 Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations? 31 For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you. 32 And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.

Here the prophet goes on with the story of their rebellions, for their further humiliation, and shows,

I. That they had persisted in them after they were settled in the land of Canaan. Though God had so many times testified his displeasure against their wicked courses, "yet in this (that is, in the very same thing) your fathers have blasphemed me, continued to affront me, that they also have trespassed a trespass against me," v. 27. Note, It is a great aggravation of sin when men will not take warning by the mischievous consequences of sin in those that have gone before them: this is *blaspheming God*; it is speaking reproachfully of his judgments, as if they were of no significancy and were not worth regarding. 1. God had made good his promise: *I brought them into the land that I had sworn to give them*. Though their unbelief and disobedience had made the performance slow, and much retarded it, yet it did not make the promise of no effect. They were often very near being cut off in the wilderness, but a step between them and ruin, and yet they came to Canaan at last. Note, Even God's Israel get to heaven by hell-gates; so many are their transgressions, and so strong their corruptions, that it is a miracle of mercy they are happy at last; as hypocrites go to hell by heaven-gates. *The righteous scarcely are saved. Per tot discrimina rerum tendimus ad cælum—Ten thousand dangers fill the road to heaven.* 2. They had broken his precept by their abominable idolatries. God had appointed them to destroy all the monuments of idolatry, that they might not be tempted

to desert his sanctuary; but, instead of defacing them, they fell in love with them, and when they saw every high hill whence they had the most delightful prospects, and all the thick trees where they had the most delightful shades (the former to show forth their pompous idolatries, the latter to conceal their shameful ones), there they offered their sacrifices and made their sweet savour, which should have been presented upon God's altar only. There they presented the provocation of their offering (v. 28), that is, their offerings, which, instead of pacifying God, or pleasing him, were highly provoking—sacrifices which, though costly, yet, being misplaced, were an abomination to the Lord. 3. They obstinately persisted herein notwithstanding all the admonitions that were given them (v. 29): "Then I told them, by my servants the prophets, told them where the high place was, to which they went; nay, I put them upon considering it, and asking their own consciences concerning it, by putting this question to them, Which is the high place whereunto you go? What do you find there so inviting that you will leave God's altars, where he requires your attendance, to frequent such places as he has forbidden you to worship in? Do you not know that those high places are of a heathenish extraction, and that the things which the Gentiles sacrificed they sacrificed to devils and not to God? Did not Moses tell you so? Deut. xxxii. 17. And will you have fellowship with devils? What is that high place to which you go when you turn your back on God's altars? O foolish Israelites, who or what has bewitched you, that you will forsake the fountain of life for broken cisterns, that worship which God appoints, and will accept, for that which he forbids, which he abhors, and which he will punish?" And yet the name is called Bamah unto this day; they will have their way, let God and his prophets say what they please to the contrary. They are wedded to their high places; even in the best reigns those were not taken away; you could not prevail to take away the name of Bamah—the high place, out of their mouths, but still they would have that in the place of their worship. The sin and the sinner are with difficulty parted.

II. That this generation, after they were unsettled, continued under the dominion of the same corrupt inclinations to idolatry, v. 30. He must say to the present house of Israel, some of whose elders were now sitting before him, "Are you polluted after the manner of your fathers? After all that God has said against you by a succession of prophets, and done against you by a series of judgments, yet will you take no warning? Will you still be as bad as your fathers were, and commit the same abominations that they committed? I see you will; you are bent upon returning to the old abominations: you

*offer your gifts in the high places, and you make your sons to pass through the fire; either you actually do it or you do it in purpose and imagination, and so you continue idolaters to this day.*" These elders seem now to have been projecting a coalition with the heathen; their hearts they will reserve for the God of Israel, but their knees they will be at liberty to bow to the gods of the nations among whom they live, that they may have the more respect and the fairer quarter among them. Now the prophet is here ordered to tell those who were forming this scheme, and were for compounding the matter between God and Baal, that they should have no comfort or benefit from either. 1. They should have no benefit by their consulting in private with the prophets of the Lord; for, because they were hearkening after idols, God would have nothing to do with them (v. 31): *As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you.* What he had said before (v. 3), having largely shown how just it was, he here repeats, as that which he would abide by. Let them not think that they honoured him by their enquiries, nor expect an answer of peace from him, as long as they continued in love and league with their idols. Note, Those reap no benefit by their religion that are not entire and sincere in it; nor can we have any comfortable communion with God in ordinances of worship unless we be inward and upright with him therein. We make nothing of our profession if it be but a profession. Nay, 2. They should have no benefit from their conforming in public to the practice of their neighbours (v. 32): "*That which comes into your mind as a piece of refined politics in the present difficult juncture, and which you would be advised to for your own preservation, and that you may not by being singular expose yourselves to abuses, it shall not be at all, it shall turn to no account to you.*" You say, '*We will be as the heathen*, we will join with them in worshipping their gods, though at the same time we do not believe them to be gods, but wood and stone, and then we should be taken as the families of the countries; they will not know, or in a little while will have forgotten, that we are Jews, and will allow us the same privileges with their own countrymen.' Tell them," says God, "that this project shall *never prosper*. Either their neighbours will not admit them to join with them in their worship, or, if they do, will think never the better, but the worse, of them for it, and will look upon them as dissemblers, and not fit to be trusted, who are thus false to their God, and put a cheat upon their neighbours." Note, There is nothing got by sinful compliances; and the carnal projects of hypocrites will stand them in no stead. It is only integrity and uprightness that will preserve men, and recommend them to God and man.

33 *As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you:* 34 *And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out.* 35 *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.* 36 *Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God.* 37 *And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:* 38 *And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country, where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord.* 39 *As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols.* 40 *For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first-fruits of your oblations, with all your holy things.* 41 *I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.* 42 *And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers.* 43 *And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed.* 44 *And ye shall know that I*



am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God.

The design which was now on foot among the elders of Israel was that the people of Israel, being scattered among the nations, should lay aside all their peculiarities and conform to those among whom they lived; but God had told them that the design should not take effect, *v. 32*. Now, in these verses, he shows particularly how it should be frustrated. They aimed at the mingling of the families of Israel with the families of the countries; but it will prove in the issue that the wicked Israelites, notwithstanding their compliances, shall not mingle with them in their prosperity, but shall be distinguished from them for destruction; for idolatrous Israelites, that are apostates from God, shall be sooner and more sorely punished than idolatrous Babylonians that never knew the way of righteousness. Read and tremble at the doom here passed upon them; it is backed with an oath not to be reversed: *As I live, saith the Lord God*, thus and thus will I deal with you. They think to make both Jerusalem and Babylon their friends by halting between two; but God threatens that neither of them shall serve for a rest or refuge for them.

I. Babylon shall not protect them, nor any of the countries of the heathen; for God will cast them out of his protection and then what prince, what people, what place, can serve to be a sanctuary to them? God was Israel's King of old, and had they continued his loyal subjects he would have ruled over them with care and tenderness for their good, but now with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over them, *v. 33*. That power which should have been exerted for their protection shall be exerted for their destruction. Note, There is no shaking off God's dominion; rule he will, either with the golden sceptre or with the iron rod; and those that will not yield to the power of his grace shall be made to sink under the power of his wrath. Now when God is angry with them, though they may think that they shall be lost in the crowd of the heathen among whom they are scattered, they will be disappointed; for (*v. 34*) *I will gather you out of the countries wherein you are scattered*, as, when the rebels are dispersed in battle, those that have escaped the sword of war are pursued and brought together out of all the places whither they were scattered, to be punished by the sword of justice. They shall be brought into the wilderness of the people (*v. 35*), either into Babylon, which is called a wilderness (*ch. xix. 13*), and the desert of the sea (*Isa. xxi. 1*), or into some place which, though full of people, shall be

to them as the wilderness was to Israel after they came out of Egypt, a place where God will plead with them face to face, as he pleaded with their fathers in the wilderness of Egypt (*v. 36*),—where their carcasses shall fall and where he will swear concerning them that they shall never return to Canaan, as he did swear concerning their fathers that they should never come into Canaan,—where he will avenge the breach of his law with as much terror as that with which he gave it in the wilderness of Sinai. Note, God has a good action against apostates, and will find not only time, but a proper place, to plead with them in upon that action, a wilderness even in the midst of the people for that purpose.

II. Israel shall be no more able to protect them than Babylon could; nor shall their relation to God's people stand them in any more stead for the other world than their compliance with idolaters shall for this world; nor shall they stand in the congregation of the righteous any more than in the congregation of evil-doers; for there will come a distinguishing day, when God will separate between the precious and the vile; he will cause them, as the shepherd causes his sheep, to pass under the rod, when he tithes them (*Lev. xxvii. 32*), that he may mark which is for God. God will take particular notice of each of them, one by one, as sheep are counted, and he will bring them into the bond of the covenant (*v. 37*); he will try them and judge of them according to the tenour of the covenant, and the difference made between some and others by the blessings and curses of the covenant. Or it may refer to those among them that repented and reformed; he will cause them to pass under the rod of affliction, and, having done them good by it, he will bring them again into the bond of the covenant, will be to them a God in covenant, and use them again as heirs of promise.

1. He will separate the wicked from among them (*v. 38*): *"I will purge out from among you the rebels, who have been a grief and scandal to you, and who have by their rebellions brought all these calamities upon you."* The judgments of God shall find them out, and their naming the name of Israel shall be no shelter to them. They shall be brought out of the countries where they sojourn, and shall not have that rest in them which they promised themselves. But they shall not enter into the land of Israel, nor enjoy the benefit of that rest which God has promised to his people. Note, Though godly people may share with the wicked in the calamities of the world, yet wicked people shall have no share with the godly in the heavenly Canaan; but it shall be part of the blessedness of that world that they shall be purged out from among them, the tares from the wheat, the chaff from the corn, *ch. xiii. 9*. But wherever these idolaters of the house of Israel were contriving to worship both God

and their idols, thinking to please both, God here protests against it (v. 39), as Elijah had done in his name: "*If the Lord be God, then follow him, but, if Baul, then follow him; if you will serve your idols, do, and take what comes of it; but then do not pretend relation to God and a religious regard to him, nor pollute his holy name with your gifts at his altar.*" Spiritual judgments are the sorest judgments. Two of that kind of judgments are threatened in this verse against those that were for dividing between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations:—(1.) That they should be given up to the service of their idols. To them he said ironically, "*Since you will not hearken unto me, go you, serve every one his idols, now that you think it will be for your interest, and hereafter also. You shall go on in it. Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;* let him take his course, and see what he will get by it at last." Note, Those who think to serve themselves by sin will find in the end that they have but enslaved themselves to sin. (2.) That they should be cut off from the service of God and communion with God: "*You shall not pollute my holy name with your vain oblations,* Isa. i. 11. You bring your gifts in your hands, wherewith you pretend to honour me, but at the same time you bring your idols in your hearts, and therefore you do but pollute me, which I will not suffer any more," Amos v. 21, 22. Note, Those are justly forbidden God's house that profane his house.

2. He will separate them to himself again. (1.) He will gather them in mercy out of the countries whither they were scattered, to be monuments of mercy, as the incorrigible were gathered to be vessels of wrath, v. 41. Not one of God's jewels shall be lost in the lumber of this world. (2.) He will bring them to the land of Israel, which he had promised to give to their fathers; and the discontinuance of their possession shall be no defeasance of their right; it is the land of Israel still, and thither God will bring them safely again, v. 42. (3.) He will re-establish his ordinances among them, will set up his sanctuary in his holy mountain, which is here called *the mountain of the height of Israel*; for, though the Mount Zion was none of the highest mountains, yet the temple there was one of the highest honours of Israel. It is promised that those who preserved their integrity, and would not serve idols, in other lands, shall return to their prosperity and shall serve the true God in their own land: *All of them in the land shall serve me.* Note, It is the true happiness of a people, and a sure token for good to them, when there is a prevailing disposition in them to serve God. Whereas God had forbidden the idolaters to bring their gifts to his altar, of these he will require offerings and first-fruits, and will accept them, v. 40. What he does not require he will not accept,

but what is done with a regard to his precepts he will be well pleased with. He will accept them with their sweet savour, or savour of rest (v. 41), as being very grateful to him and what he takes a complacency in; whereas, to hypocritical worshippers, he says, *I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.* (4.) He will give them true repentance for their sins, v. 43. When they find how gracious God is to them they will be overcome with his kindness, and blush to think of their bad behaviour towards so good a God: "*There, in my holy mountain, when you come to enjoy the privileges of that again, there shall you remember your doings, wherein you have been defiled.*" Note, The more conversant we are with God's holiness the more we shall see of the odious nature of sin. *There you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight.* Note, Ingenuous evangelical repentance makes people loathe themselves for their sins, as Job xlii. 5, 6. (5.) He will give them the knowledge of himself: *They shall know by experience that he is the Lord,* that he is a God of almighty power and inexhaustible goodness, kind to his people and faithful to his covenant with them. Note, All the favours we receive from God should lead us into a more intimate acquaintance with him. (6.) He will do all this for his own name's sake, notwithstanding their undeservings and ill-deservings (v. 44); he has wrought with them, that is, wrought for them, wrought in favour of them, wrought in concurrence with them, they doing their endeavour; he has wrought with them purely for his name's sake. His reasons were all fetched from himself. Had he dealt with them according to their wicked ways and their corrupt doings, though they were the better and sounder part of the house of Israel, he would have left them to be scattered and lost with the rest; but he recovered and restored them for the sake of his own name, not only that it might not be polluted (v. 14), but that he might be sanctified in them before the heathen (v. 41), that he might sanctify himself (so the word is); for it is God's work to glorify his own name. He will do well for his people that he may have the glory of it, that he may manifest himself to be a God pardoning sin and so keeping promise, that his people may praise him, and that their neighbours may likewise take notice of him, as they did when God turned again their captivity, Ps. cxxvi. 3. *Then said they among the heathen, The Lord has done great things for them.*

45 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 46 Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field; 47 And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord God; Behold,



I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. 48 And all flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it: it shall not be quenched. 49 Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?

We have here a prophecy of wrath against Judah and Jerusalem, which would more fitly have begun the next chapter than conclude this; for it has no dependence on what goes before, but that which follows in the beginning of the next chapter is the explication of it, when the people complained that this was a parable which they understood not. In this parable, 1. It is a forest that is prophesied against, *the forest of the south field*, Judah and Jerusalem. These lay south from Babylon, where Ezekiel now was, and therefore he is directed to *set his face towards the south* (v. 46), to intimate to them that God had set his face against them, was displeased with them, and determined to destroy them. But, though it be a message of wrath which he has to deliver, he must deliver it with mildness and tenderness; he must *drop his word towards the south*; his doctrine must *distil as the rain* (Deut. xxxii. 2), that people's hearts might be softened by it, as the earth by the *river of God*, which *drops upon the pastures of the wilderness* (Ps. lxxv. 12) and which a south land more especially calls for, Josh. xv. 19. Judah and Jerusalem are called *forests*, not only because they had been full of people, as a wood of trees, but because they had been empty of fruit, for fruit-trees grow not in a forest; and a forest is put in opposition to a fruitful field, Isa. xxxii. 15. Those that should have been as the garden of the Lord, and his vineyard, had become like a forest, all overgrown with *briers and thorns*; and those that are so, that bring not forth the fruits of righteousness, God's word prophesies against. 2. It is a fire kindled in his forest that is prophesied of, v. 47. All those judgments which wasted and consumed both the city and the country—sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity, are signified by this fire. (1.) It is a fire of God's own kindling: *I will kindle a fire in thee*; the *breath of the Lord* is not as a drop, but as a *stream, of brimstone* to set it on fire, Isa. xxx. 33. He that had been himself a protecting fire about Jerusalem is now a consuming fire in it. *All flesh shall see* by the fury of this fire, and the desolations it shall make, especially when they compare it with the sins which had made them fuel for this fire, that it is *the Lord that has kindled it* (v. 48), as a just avenger of his own injured honour. (2.) This conflagration shall be general: all orders

and degrees of men shall be devoured by it—*young and old, rich and poor, high and low*. Even *green trees*, which the fire does not easily fasten upon, shall be devoured by this fire; even good people shall some of them be involved in these calamities; and *if this be done in the green trees, what shall be done in the dry?* The dry trees shall be as tinder and touch-wood to this fire. *All faces* (that is, all that covers the face of the earth) *from the south of Canaan to the north, from Beersheba to Dan, shall be burnt therein*. (3.) *The fire shall not be quenched*; no attempts to give check to the dissolution shall prevail. When God will ruin a nation, who or what can save it?

Now observe, 1. The people's reflection upon the prophet on occasion of this discourse. They said, *Does he not speak parables?* This was the language either of their ignorance or infidelity (the plainest truths were as parables to them), or of their malice and ill-will to the prophet. Note. It is common for those who will not be wrought upon by the word to pick quarrels with it; it is either too plain or too obscure, too fine or too homely, too common or too singular; something or other is amiss in it. 2. The prophet's complaint to God: *Ah, Lord God! they say so and so of me*. Note, It is a comfort to us, when people speak ill of us unjustly, that we have a God to complain to.

## CHAP. XXI.

In this chapter we have, I. An explication of the prophecy in the close of the foregoing chapter concerning the fire in the forest, which the people complained they could not understand (ver. 1—5), with directions to the prophet to show himself deeply affected with it, ver. 6, 7. II. A further prediction of the sword that was coming upon the land, by which all should be laid waste; and this expressed very emphatically, ver. 8—17. III. A prospect given of the king of Babylon's approach to Jerusalem, to which he was determined by divination, ver. 18—24. IV. Sentence passed upon Zedekiah king of Judah, ver. 25—27. V. The destruction of the Ammonites by the sword foretold, ver. 28—32. Thus is this chapter all threatenings.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop *thy word* toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel, 3 And say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I *am* against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked. 4 Seeing then that I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of his sheath against all flesh from the south to the north: 5 That all flesh may know that I the LORD have drawn forth my sword out of his sheath: it shall not return any more. 6 Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of *thy* loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes.

7 And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord God.

The prophet had faithfully delivered the message he was entrusted with, in the close of the foregoing chapter, in the terms wherein he received it, not daring to add his own comment upon it; but, when he complained that the people found fault with him for speaking parables, the word of the Lord came to him again, and gave him a key to that figurative discourse, that with it he might let the people into the meaning of it and so silence that objection. For all men shall be rendered inexcusable at God's bar and every mouth shall be stopped. Note, He that *speaks with tongues* should *pray that he may interpret*, 1 Cor. xiv. 13. When we speak to people about their souls we should study plainness, and express ourselves as we may be the best understood. Christ *expounded his parables to his disciples*, Mark iv. 34. 1. The prophet is here more plainly directed against whom to level the arrow of this prophecy. He must *drop his word towards the holy places* (v. 2), towards Canaan the holy land, Jerusalem the holy city, the temple the holy house. These were highly dignified above other places; but, when they polluted them, that word which used to drop in the holy places shall now drop against them: *Prophecy against the land of Israel*. It was the honour of Israel that it had prophets and prophecy; but these, being despised by them, are turned against them. And justly is Zion battered with her own artillery, which used to be employed against her adversaries, seeing she knew not how to value it. 2. He is instructed, and is to instruct the people, in the meaning of the fire that was threatened to consume the forest of the south: it signified a sword drawn, the sword of war which should make the land desolate (v. 3): *Behold, I am against thee, O land of Israel!* There needs no more to make a people miserable than to have God against them; for as, if he be for us, we need not fear, whoever are against us, so, if he be against us, we cannot hope, whoever are for us. And God's professing people, when they revolt from him, set him against them, who used to be for them. Was the fire there of God's kindling? The sword here is his sword, which he has prepared, and which he will give commission to; it is he that will *draw it out of its sheath*, where it had lain quiet and threatened no harm. Note, When the sword is unsheathed among the nation: God's hand must be eyed and

owned in it. Did the fire devour *every green tree and every dry tree*? The sword in like manner shall *cut off the righteous and the wicked*. Good and bad were involved in the common calamities of the nation; the righteous were *cut off from the land of Israel* when they were sent captives in Babylon, though perhaps few or none of them were cut off from the land of the living; and it was a threatening omen to the land of Israel that in the beginning of its troubles such excellent men as Daniel and his fellows, and Ezekiel, were cut off from it and conveyed to Babylon. But though the sword *cut off the righteous and the wicked* (for it *devours one as well as another*, 2 Sam. xi. 25), yet far be it from us to think that the *righteous are as the wicked*, Gen. xviii. 25. No; God's graces and comforts make a great difference when his providence seems to make none. The *good figs* are sent into Babylon for their good, Jer. xxiv. 5, 6. It is only in outward appearance that there is *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, Eccl. ix. 2. But it speaks the greatness of God's displeasure against the land of Israel. Well might it be said, *His eye shall not spare*, when it shall not spare, no, not the *righteous* in it. Since there are not righteous men sufficient to save the land, to make the justice of God the more illustrious the few that there are shall suffer with it, and God's mercy shall make it up to them some other way. Did the fire *burn up all faces from the south to the north*? The sword shall go *forth against all flesh from the south to the north*, shall go forth, as God's sword, with a commission that cannot be contested, with a force that cannot be resisted. Were all flesh made to know that God kindled the fire? They shall be made to know that he has *drawn forth the sword*, v. 5. And, *lastly*, Shall the fire that is *kindled never be quenched*? So when this sword of the Lord is drawn against Judah and Jerusalem the scabbard is thrown away, and it shall never be sheathed: *It shall not return any more*, till it has made a full end. 3. The prophet is ordered, by expressions of his own grief and concern for these calamities that were coming on, to try to make impressions of the like upon the people. When he has delivered his message he must *sigh* (v. 6), must fetch many deep sighs, *with the breaking of his loins*; he must sigh as if his heart would burst, *sigh with bitterness*, with other expressions of bitter sorrow, and this publicly, *in the sight* of those to whom he delivered the foregoing message, that this might be a sermon to their eyes as that was to their ears; and it was well if both would work upon them. The prophet must sigh, though it was painful to himself and made his breast sore, and though it is probable that the profane among the people would ridicule him for it and call him a whining canting preacher. But, *if we be beside ourselves, it is to God*; and, *if this be to be vile*,



*we will be yet more so.* Note, Ministers, if they would affect others with the things they speak of, must show that they are themselves in the greatest sincerity affected with them, and must submit to that which may create uneasiness to themselves, so that it will promote the ends of their ministry. The people, observing the prophet to sigh so much and seeing no visible occasion for it, would ask, "*Wherefore sighest thou?*" These sighs have some mystical meaning; let us know what it is." And he must answer them (v. 7): "*It is for the tidings, the heavy tidings, that we shall hear shortly; the tidings come (the judgments come which we hear the tidings of), they come apace, and then you will all sigh; nay, that will not serve. every heart shall melt and every spirit fail; your courage will all be gone and you will have no animating considerations to support yourselves with. And, when heart and spirit fail, it will follow of course that all hands will be feeble and unable to fight, and all knees will be weak as water and unable to flee or to stand their ground.*" Those who have God for them when flesh and heart fail have him to be the strength of their heart; but those who have God against them have no cordial for a fainting spirit, but are as Belshazzar when *his thoughts troubled him*, Dan. v. 6. But some people are worse frightened than hurt; may not the case be so here and the event prove better than likely? No: *Behold it cometh, and shall be brought to pass.* It is not a bugbear that they are frightened with, but according to the fear so is the wrath, and more grievous than is feared.

8 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 9 Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, a sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: 10 It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. 11 And he hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. 12 Cry and howl, son of man: for it shall be upon my people, it shall be upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh. 13 Because it is a trial, and what if the sword condemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord God. 14 Thou therefore, son of man, prophesy, and smite thine hands together, and let

the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the slain: it is the sword of the great men that are slain, which entereth into their privy chambers. 15 I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made bright, it is wrapped up for the slaughter. 16 Go thee one way or other, either on the right hand, or on the left, whithersoever thy face is set. 17 I will also smite mine hands together, and I will cause my fury to rest: I the LORD have said it.

Here is another prophecy of the sword, which is delivered in a very affecting manner; the expressions here used are somewhat intricate, and perplex interpreters. The sword was unsheathed in the foregoing verses; here it is fitted up to do execution, which the prophet is commanded to lament. Observe,

I. How the sword is here described. 1. It is sharpened, that it may cut and wound, and make a sore slaughter. The wrath of God will put an edge upon it; and, whatever instruments God shall please to make use of in executing his judgments, he will fill them with strength, courage, and fury, according to the service they are employed in. Out of the mouth of Christ goes a sharp sword, Rev. xix. 15. 2. It is furbished, that it may glitter, to the terror of those against whom it is drawn. It shall be a kind of flaming sword. If it have rusted in the scabbard for want of use, it shall be rubbed and brightened; for though the glory of God's justice may seem to have been eclipsed for a while, during the day of his patience and the delay of his judgments, yet it will shine out again and be made to glitter. 3. It is a victorious sword, nothing shall stand before it (v. 10): *It contemneth the rod of my son as every tree.* Israel, said God once, *is my son, my first-born.* The government of that people was called a rod, a strong rod; we read (ch. xix. 11) of the strong rods they had for sceptres. But when the sword of God's justice is drawn it contemns this rod, makes nothing of it; though it be a strong rod, and the rod of his son, it is no more than any other tree. When God's professing people have revolted from him, and are in rebellion against him, his sword despises them. What are they to him more than another people? The marginal reading gives another notion of this sword: *It is the rod of my son; and we know of whom God has said (Ps. ii. 7), Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee, and (v. 9) Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.* This sword is that rod of iron which contemns every tree and will bear it down. Or, This sword is the rod of my son, a cor-



recting rod, for the chastening of the transgression of God's people (2 Sam. vii. 14), not to cut them off from being a people. It is a sword to others, a rod to my son.

II. How the sword is here put into the hand of the executors: It is *the rod of my Son*, and he has given it that it may be handled (v. 11), that it may be made use of for the end for which it was drawn. It is given into the hand, not of the fencer to be played with, but of the slayer to do execution with. The sword of war my Son makes use of as a sword of justice, and to him *all judgment is committed*. It is made bright (v. 15), it is wrapped up, that it may be kept safe, and clean, and sharp for the slaughter, not as Goliath's sword was wrapped up in a cloth only for a memorial," 1 Sam. xxi. 9.

III. How the sword is directed, and against whom it is sent (v. 12): *It shall be upon my people*; they shall fall by this sword. It is repeated again, as that which is scarcely credible, that *the sword of the heathen shall be upon God's own people*; nay, it shall be upon *all the princes of Israel*; their dignity and power as princes shall be no more their security than their profession of religion as princes of Israel. But, if the sword be at any time upon God's people, have they not comfort within sufficient to arm them against every thing in it that is frightful? Yes, they have, while they conduct themselves as becomes his people; but these had not done so, and therefore *terrors, by reason of the sword*, shall be upon those that call themselves *my people*. Note, While good men are quiet, not only from evil, but from the fear of it, wicked men are disturbed not only with the sword, but with the terrors of it, arising from a consciousness of their own guilt. This sword is directed particularly against the great men, for they had been the greatest sinners among them; they had *altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds* (Jer. v. 5), and therefore with them in a special manner God's controversy is, who had been the ringleaders in sin. The sword of the slain is the sword of the great men that are slain, v. 14. Though they have furnished themselves with places of retirement, places of concealment, where they flatter themselves with hopes that they shall be safe, they will find that the sword will enter into their *privy chambers*, and find them out there, as the frogs, when they were one of Egypt's plagues, found admission into the chambers of their kings. The sword, the point of this sword, is directed against their gates, against all their gates (v. 15), against all those things with which they thought to keep it out and fortify themselves against it. Note, The strongest gates, though they be gates of brass, ever so well barred, ever so well guarded, are no fence against the point of the sword of God's judgments. But when that is pointed against sinners, 1. They are ready to fear the worst; *their hearts faint*, so that they are

not able to make any resistance. 2. The worst comes; whatever resistance they make, it is to no purpose, but they are ruined, and *their ruins are multiplied*. But what need have we to observe the particular directions of this sword when it has a general commission, is sent with a running warrant? (v. 16): "Go thee, one way or other, which way thou wilt, turn to the right hand or to the left, thou wilt find those that are obnoxious, for there are none free from guilt; and thou hast authority against them, for there are none exempt from punishment; and therefore, *whithersoever thy face is set*, that way do thou proceed, and, like Jonathan's sword, *from the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, thou shalt never return empty*," 2 Sam. i. 22. Note, So full is the world of wicked people that, which way soever God's judgments go forth, they will find work, will find matter to work upon. That fire will never go out on this earth for want of fuel. And such various methods God has of meeting with sinners that the sword of his justice is still as it was at first when it flamed in the hand of the cherubim: it turns every way, Gen. iii. 24.

IV. What is the nature of this sword, and what are the intentions and limitations of it as to the people of God, v. 13. It is a correction; it is designed to be so; the sword to others is a rod to them. This is a comfortable word which comes in in the midst of these terrible ones, though it be expressed somewhat obscurely. 1. The people of God begin to be afraid that *the sword will condemn even the rod*, that the sword will go on with such fury that it will despise its commission to be a rod only, will forget its bounds and become a sword indeed, even to God's own people. They fear lest the Chaldeans' sword, which is the rod of God's anger, condemn its being called a rod, and become as the axe that boasts itself against him that heweth therewith or the staff that lifts up itself as if it were no wood, Isa. x. 15. Or, "What if the sword condemn even the rod?" that is, what if this sword make the former rods, as that of Sennacherib, to be condemned as nothing to this? What if this should prove not a correcting rod, but a destroying sword, to make a full end of our church and nation?" This is that which the thinking, but timorous, few are apprehensive of. Note, When threatening judgments are abroad it is good to suppose the worst that may be the consequences of them, that we may provide accordingly. What if the sword condemn the tribe or sceptre? namely, that of Judah and the house of David (so some think Shebet here signifies); what if it should aim at the ruin of our government? If it do, the Lord is righteous and will be gracious notwithstanding. But, 2. These fears are silenced with an assurance that it is not so; the sword shall not forget itself, nor the errand on which it is sent: *It is a trial*, and it is no more than



a trial. He that sends it makes what use of it, and sets what bounds to it, he pleases. Here shall its proud waves be stayed. Note, It is matter of comfort to the people of God, when his judgments are abroad, and they are ready to tremble for fear of them, that, whatever they are to others, to them they are but trials; and, *when they are tried, they shall come forth as gold*, and the proving of their faith shall be the improving of it.

V. Here the prophet and the people must show themselves affected with these judgments threatened. 1. The prophet must be very serious in denouncing these judgments. He must say, *A sword! a sword!* v. 9. Let him not study for fine words, and a variety of quaint expressions; when the town is on fire people do not so give notice of it, but cry, with a frightful doleful voice, *Fire! fire!* So must the prophet cry, *A sword! a sword!* and (v. 14), *Let the word be doubled the third time* in thy preaching. God speaks once, yea, twice, yea, thrice; it were well if men, after all, would perceive and regard it. It shall be *doubled the third time* in God's providence; for it was Nebuchadnezzar's third descent upon Jerusalem that *made a full end* of it. Ruin comes gradually, but at last comes effectually, upon a provoking people. Yet this is not all: the prophet is not only as a herald at arms to proclaim war, and to cry, *A sword! a sword!* once and again, and a third time, but, as a person nearly concerned, he must *cry and howl* (v. 12), must sadly lament the desolations that the sword would make, as one that did himself not only sympathize with the sufferers, but feel from the sufferings. Again (v. 14), *Prophesy, and smite thy hands together*, wring *thy hands*, as lamenting the desolation, or clap thy hands, as by thy prophecy instigating and encouraging those that were to be the instruments of it, or as one standing amazed at the suddenness and severity of the judgment. The prophet must *smite his hands together*; for (says God) *I will also smite my hands together*, v. 17. God is in earnest in pronouncing this sentence upon them, and therefore the prophet must show himself in earnest in publishing it. God's *smiting his hands together*, as well as the prophet's smiting, is in token of a holy indignation at their wickedness, which was really very astonishing. When Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam he *smote his hands together*, Num. xxiv. 10. Note, God and his ministers are justly angry at those who might be saved and yet will be ruined. Some make it an expression of triumph and exultation, agreeing with that (Isa. i. 24), *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*; and that (Prov. i. 26), *I also will laugh at their calamity*. And so it follows here, *I will cause my fury to rest*, not only it shall be perfected, but it shall be pleased. And observe with what solemnity, with what authority, this sentence is ratified: *"If the Lord have said it, who can and will make good*

what I have said. I have said it, and will never unsay it. I have said it, and who can gainsay it?" 2. The people must be very serious in the prospect of these judgments. An intimation of this comes in in a parenthesis (v. 10): *Should we then make mirth?* Seeing God has drawn the sword, and the prophet sighs and cries, *Should we then make mirth?* The prophet seems to give this as a reason why he sighs; as Neh. ii. 3, *Why should not my countenance be sad*, when Jerusalem lies waste? Note, Before we allow ourselves to be merry, we ought to consider whether we should be merry or no. Should we make mirth, we who are sentenced to the sword, who lie under the wrath and curse of God? *Shall we make mirth as other people, who have gone a whoring from our God?* Hos. ix. 1. Should we now make mirth, when the hand of God has gone out against us, when God's judgments are abroad in the land and he by them *calls to weeping and mourning?* Isa. xxii. 11, 13. Shall we now make mirth as the king and Haman, when the church is in perplexity (Esther iii. 15), when we should be *grieving for the affliction of Joseph?* Amos vi. 6.

18 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, 19 Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose *it* at the head of the way to the city. 20 Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced. 21 For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made *his* arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver. 22 At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint *battering* rams against the gates, to cast a mount, *and* to build a fort. 23 And it shall be unto them as a false divination in their sight, to them that have sworn oaths: but he will call to remembrance the iniquity, that they may be taken. 24 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do

appear; because, *I say*, that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand. 25 And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity *shall have* an end, 26 Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this *shall not be* the same: exalt *him that is low*, and abase *him that is high*. 27 I will overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no *more*, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it *him*.

The prophet, in the verses before, had shown them the sword coming; he here shows them that sword coming against them, that they might not flatter themselves that by some means or other it should be diverted a contrary way.

I. He must see and show the Chaldean army coming against Jerusalem and determined by a supreme power so to do. The prophet must *appoint him two ways*, that is, he must upon a paper draw out two roads (v. 19), as sometimes is done in maps; and he must bring the king of Babylon's army to the place where the roads part, for there they will make a stand. They both *come out of the same land*; but when they come to the place where one road leads to Rabbath, the head city of the Ammonites, and the other to Jerusalem, he makes a pause; for, though he is resolved to be the ruin of both, yet he is not determined which to attack first; here his politics and his politicians leave him at a loss. The sword must go either to Rabbath or to Judah in Jerusalem. Many of the inhabitants of Judah had now taken shelter in Jerusalem, and all the interests of the country were bound up in the safety of the city, and therefore it is called *Judah in Jerusalem the defended*; so strongly fortified was it, both by nature and art, that it was thought impregnable, Lam. iv. 12. The prophet must describe this dilemma that the king of Babylon is at (v. 21); *for the king of Babylon stood* (that is, he shall stand considering what course to take) *at the head of the two ways*. Though he was a prince of great foresight and great resolution, yet, it seems, he knew neither his own interest nor his own mind. Let not the wise man then glory in his wisdom nor the mighty man in his arbitrary power, for even those that may do what they will seldom know what to do for the best. Now observe, 1. The method he took to come to a resolution; he *used divination*, applied to a higher and invisible power, perhaps to the determination of Providence by a lot, in order to which he *made his arrows bright*, that were to be drawn for the lots, in honour of the solemnity. Perhaps *Jerusalem* was written on one arrow and *Rabbath* on the other, and that which

was first drawn out of the quiver he determined to attack first. Or he applied to the direction of some pretended oracle: he *consulted with images or teraphim*, expecting to receive audible answers from them. Or to the observations which the augurs made upon the entrails of the sacrifices: *he looked in the liver*, whether the position of that portended good or ill luck. Note, It is a mortification to the pride of the wise men of the earth that in difficult cases they have been glad to make their court to heaven for direction; as it is an instance of their folly that they have taken such ridiculous ways of doing it, when in cases proper for an appeal to Providence it is sufficient that *the lot be cast into the lap*, with that prayer, *Give a perfect lot*, and a firm belief that the *disposal thereof* is not fortuitous, but *of the Lord*, Prov. xvi. 33. 2. The resolution he was hereby brought to. Even by these sinful practices God served his own purposes and directed him to go to Jerusalem, v. 22. *The divination for Jerusalem* happened to be *at his right hand*, which, according to the rules of divination, determined him *that way*. Note, What services God designs men for he will be sure in his providence to lead them to, though perhaps they themselves are not aware what guidance they are under. Well, Jerusalem being the mark set up, the campaign is presently opened with the siege of that important place. *Captains* are appointed for the command of the forces to be employed in the siege, who must *open the mouth in the slaughter*, must give directions to the soldiers what to do and make speeches to animate them. Orders are given to provide every thing necessary for carrying on the siege with vigour; *battering rams* must be prepared and *forts built*. O what pains, what cost, are men at to destroy one another!

II. He must show both the people and the prince that they bring this destruction upon themselves by their own sin.

1. The people do so, v. 23, 24. They slight the notices that are given them of the judgment coming. Ezekiel's prophecy is to them a *false divination*; they are not moved or awakened to repentance by it. When they hear that Nebuchadnezzar by his divinations is directed to Jerusalem, and assured of success in that enterprise, they laugh at it and continue *secure*, calling it a *false divination*; because *they have sworn oaths*, that is, they have joined in a solemn league with the Egyptians, and they depend upon the promise they have made them to *raise the siege*, or upon the assurances which the false prophets have given them that it shall be raised. Or it may refer to the oaths of allegiance they had sworn to the king of Babylon, but had violated, for which treachery of theirs God had given them up to a judicial blindness, so that the fairest warnings given them were slighted by them as false divinations. Note, It is not strange if those who make a



jest of the most sacred oaths can make a jest likewise of the most sacred oracles; for where will a profane mind stop? But shall their unbelief invalidate the counsel of God? Are they safe because they are secure? By no means; nay, the contempt they put upon divine warnings is a sin that brings to remembrance their other sins, and they may thank themselves if they be now remembered against them. (1.) Their present wickedness is discovered. Now that God is contending with them so perverse and obstinate are they that whatever they offer in their own defence does but add to their offence; they never conducted themselves so ill as they did now that they had the loudest call given them to repent and reform: "*So that in all your doings your sins do appear.*" Turn yourselves which way you will, you show a black side." This is too true of every one of us; for not only there is *none that lives and sins not*, but *there is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not*. Our best services have such allays of weakness, and folly, and imperfection, and so much evil is present with us even when we would do good, that we may say, with sorrow and shame, *In all our doings, and in all our sayings too, our sins do appear*, and witness against us, so that if we were under the law we were undone. (2.) This brings to mind their former wickedness: "*You have made your iniquity to be remembered*, not by yourselves that it might be repented of, but by the justice of God that it might be reckoned for. Your own sins make the sins of your fathers to be remembered against you, which otherwise you should never have smarted for." Note, God remembers former iniquities against those only who by the present discoveries of their wickedness show that they do not repent of them. (3.) That they may suffer for all together, they are turned over to the destroyer, that they may be taken (v. 23): "*You shall be taken with the hand that God had appointed to seize you and to hold you and out of which you cannot escape.*" Men are said to be *God's hand* when they are made use of as the ministers of his justice, Ps. xvii. 14. Note, Those who will not be taken with the word of God's grace shall at last be taken by the hand of his wrath.

2. The prince likewise brings his ruin upon himself. Zedekiah is the *prince of Israel*, to whom the prophet here, in God's name, addresses himself; and, if he had not spoken in God's name, he would not have spoken so boldly, so bluntly; for *is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked?* (1.) He gives him his character, v. 25. Thou profane and wicked prince of Israel! He was not so bad as some of his predecessors, and yet bad enough to merit his character. He was himself profane, lost to every thing that is virtuous and sacred. And he was wicked, as he promoted sin among his people; he sinned, and made Israel to sin. Note, Pro-

faneness and wickedness are bad in any, but worst of all in a prince, a prince of Israel, who as an Israelite should know better himself, and as a prince should set a better example and have a better influence on those about him. (2.) He reads him his doom. His iniquity *has an end*; the measure of it is full, and therefore *his day has come*, the day of his punishment, the day of divine vengeance. Note, Though those who are wicked and profane may flourish awhile, yet *their day will come* to fall. The sentence here passed is, [1.] 'That Zedekiah shall be deposed. He has forfeited his crown, and he shall no longer wear it; he has by his profaneness profaned his crown, and it shall be cast to the ground (v. 26): *Remove the diadem.* Crowns and diadems are loseable things; it is only in the other world that there is a crown of glory that fades not away, a kingdom that cannot be moved. The Chaldee paraphrase expounds it thus: *Take away the diadem from Seraiah the chief priest, and I will take away the crown from Zedekiah the king; neither this nor that shall abide in his place, but shall be removed. This shall not be the same*, not the same that he has been; *this not this* (so the word is); profane and wicked perhaps he is as he has been, but not prince of Israel as he has been. Note, Men lose their dignity by their iniquity. Their profaneness and wickedness remove their diadem, and take off their crown, and make them the reverse of what they were. [2.] That great confusion and disorder in the state shall follow hereupon. Every thing shall be turned upside down. The conqueror shall take a pride in *exalting him that is low and abasing him that is high*, preferring some and degrading others, at his pleasure, without any regard either to right or merit. [3.] Attempts to re-establish the government shall be blasted and come to nothing, Gedaliah's particularly, and Ishmael's who was of the *seed-royal* (to which the Chaldee paraphrase refers this); neither of them shall be able to make any thing of it. *I will overturn, overturn, overturn*, first one project and then another; for who can build up what God will throw down? [4.] This monarchy shall never be restored till it is fixed for perpetuity in the hands of the Messiah. *There shall be no more kings of the house of David after Zedekiah, till Christ comes, whose right the kingdom is*, who is that seed of David in whom the promise was to have its full accomplishment, and *I will give it to him*. He shall have the *throne of his father David*, Luke i. 32. Immediately before the coming of Christ there was a long eclipse of the royal dignity, as there was also a failing of the spirit of prophecy, that his shining forth in the fulness of time both as king and prophet might appear the more illustrious. Note, Christ has an incontestable title to the dominion and sovereignty both in the church and in the world; the kingdom is his right. And.



having the right, ne shall in due time have the possession: *I will give it to him*; and there shall be a general overturning of all rather than he shall come short of his right, and a certain overturning of all the opposition that stands in his way to make room for him, Dan. ii. 45; 1 Cor. xv. 25. This is mentioned here for the comfort of those who feared that the promise made in David would fail for evermore. "No," says God, "that promise is sure, for the Messiah's kingdom shall last for ever."

28 And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God concerning the Ammonites, and concerning their reproach; even say thou, The sword, the sword is drawn: for the slaughter it is furbished, to consume because of the glittering: 29 Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine a lie unto thee, to bring thee upon the necks of *them that are slain*, of the wicked, whose day is come, when their iniquity *shall have an end*. 30 Shall I cause it to return into his sheath? I will judge thee in the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy nativity. 31 And I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skilful to destroy. 32 Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire; thy blood shall be in the midst of the land; thou shalt be no more remembered: for I the LORD have spoken it.

The prediction of the destruction of the Ammonites, which was effected by Nebuchadnezzar about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, seems to come in here upon occasion of the king of Babylon's diverting his design against Rabbath, when he turned it upon Jerusalem. Upon this the Ammonites grew very insolent, and triumphed over Jerusalem; but the prophet must let them know that forbearance is no acquittance; the reprieve is not a pardon; their day also is at hand; their turn comes next, and it will be but a poor satisfaction to them that they are to be devoured last, to be last executed.

I. The sin of the Ammonites is here intimated; it is *their reproach*, v. 28. 1. The reproach they put upon themselves when they hearkened to their false prophets (for such it seems there were among them as well as among the Jews), who pretended to foretel their perpetual safety in the midst of the desolations that were made of the countries round about them: "They see vanity unto

*thee and divine a lie*, v. 29. They flatter thee with promises of peace, and thou art such a fool as to suffer thyself to be imposed upon by them and to encourage them therein by giving credit to them." Note, Those that feed themselves with a self-conceit in the day of their prosperity prepare matter for a self-reproach in the day of their calamity. 2. The reproach they put upon the Israel of God, when they triumphed in their afflictions, and thereby added affliction to them, which was very barbarous and inhuman. Their divines, by puffing them up with a conceit that they were a better people than Israel, being spared when they were cut off, and with a confidence that their prosperity should always continue, made them so very haughty and insolent that they did even tread on the necks of the Israelites that were slain, slain by the wicked Chaldeans, who had commission to execute God's judgments upon them when their iniquity had an end, that is, when the measure of it was full. We shall meet with this again, ch. xxv. 3, &c. Note, Those are ripening apace for misery who trample upon the people of God in their distress, whereas they ought to tremble when judgment begins at the house of God.

II. The utter destruction of the Ammonites is threatened. For the reproach cast on the church by her neighbours will be returned into their own bosom, Ps. lxxix. 12. Let us see how terrible the threatening is and the destruction will be. 1. It shall come from the wrath of God, who resents the indignities and injuries done to his people as done to himself (v. 31): *I will pour out my indignation as a shower of fire and brimstone upon thee*. The least drop of divine indignation and wrath will create tribulation and anguish enough to the soul of man that does evil; what then would a full stream of that indignation and wrath do? "*I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath*"; that is, I will blow up the fire of my wrath against thee; it shall burn with the utmost vehemence." *Thou shalt be for fuel to this fire*, v. 32. Note, Wicked men make themselves fuel to the fire of God's wrath; they are consumed by it, and it is inflamed by them. 2. It shall be effected by the sword of war; to them he must cry, as before to Israel, because they had triumphed in Israel's overthrow: *The sword, the sword is drawn* (v. 28, compare v. 9, 10); it is drawn to consume because of the glittering, because it is brandished and glitters, and is fit to be made use of. God's executions will answer his preparations. This sword, when it is drawn, shall not return into its sheath (v. 30) till it has done the work for which it was drawn. When the sword is drawn it does not return till God causes it to return, and he is in one mind and who can turn him? Who can change his purpose? 3. The persons employed in it are brutish men, and skilful to destroy. Men of such a bad character as this, who have the wit of



men to do the work of wild beasts—human reason, which makes them skilful, but no human compassion, which makes them skilful only to destroy—though they are the scandal of mankind, yet sometimes are made use of to serve God's purposes. God *delivers the Ammonites into the hands of such*, and justly, for they themselves were brutish, and delighted in the destruction of God's Israel. We have reason to pray, as Paul desired to be prayed for, that we may be *delivered from wicked and unreasonable men* (2 Thess. iii. 2), men that seem made for doing mischief. 4. The place where they should thus be reckoned with: "*I will judge thee where thou wast created*, where thou wast first formed into a people, and where thou hast been settled ever since, and therefore where thou seemest to have taken root; *the land of thy nativity* shall be the land of thy destruction." Note, God can bring ruin upon us even where we are most secure, and turn us out of that land which we thought we had a title to not to be disputed and a possession of not to be disturbed. *Thy blood shall be shed* not only in thy borders, but *in the midst of thy land*. Lastly, It shall be an irreparable ruin: 'Though thou mayest think to recover thyself, it is in vain to think of it; thou *shalt be no more remembered* with any respect, Ps. ix. 6. Justly is their name blotted out who would have Israel's name for ever lost.

## CHAP. XXII.

Here are three separate messages which God entrusts the prophet to deliver concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and all to the same purpose, to show them their sins and the judgments that were coming upon them for those sins. I. Here is a catalogue of their sins, by which they had exposed themselves to shame and for which God would bring them to ruin, ver. 1—16. II. They are here compared to dross, and are condemned as dross to the fire, ver. 17—22. III. All orders and degrees of men among them are here found guilty of the neglect of the duty of their place and of having contributed to the national guilt, which therefore, since none appeared as intercessors, they must all expect to share in the punishment of, ver. 23—31.

**M**OREOVER the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Now, thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou judge the bloody city? yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations. 3 Then say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; The city sheddeth blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and maketh idols against herself to defile herself. 4 Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed; and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made: and thou hast caused thy days to draw near, and art come *even* unto thy years: therefore have I made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries. 5 *Those that be near*, and *those that be far* from thee, shall mock thee. *which*

*art* infamous *and* much vexed. 6 Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in thee to their power to shed blood. 7 In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. 8 Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. 9 In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. 10 In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. 11 And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God. 13 Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee. 14 Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken *it*, and will do *it*. 15 And I will scatter thee among the heathen, and disperse thee in the countries, and will consume thy filthiness out of thee. 16 And thou shalt take thine inheritance in thyself in the sight of the heathen, and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD.

In these verses the prophet by a commission from Heaven sits as a judge upon the bench, and Jerusalem is made to hold up her hand as a prisoner at the bar; and, if prophets were set over other nations, much more over God's nation, Jer. i. 10. This prophet is authorized to *judge the bloody city*, the *city of bloods*. Jerusalem is so called, not only because she had been guilty of the particular sin of blood-shed, but because her crimes in general were bloody crimes (*ch.* vii. 23), such as polluted her in her blood, and for which she deserved to have blood given her to drink. Now the business of a judge with

a malefactor is to convict him of his crimes, and then to pass sentence upon him for them. These two things Ezekiel is to do here.

I. He is to find Jerusalem guilty of many heinous crimes here enumerated in a long bill of indictment, and it is *billa vera*—a true bill; so he writes upon it whose judgment we are sure is according to truth. He must show her all her abominations (v. 2), that God may be justified in all the desolations brought upon her. Let us take a view of all the particular sins which Jerusalem here stands charged with; and they are all exceedingly sinful.

1. Murder: *The city sheds blood*, not only in the suburbs, where the strangers dwell, but in the midst of it, where, one would think, the magistrates would, if any where, be vigilant. Even there people were murdered either in duels or by secret assassinations and poisonings, or in the courts of justice under colour of law, and there was no care taken to discover and punish the murderers according to the law (Gen. ix. 6), no, nor so much as the ceremony used to expiate an uncertain murder (Deut. xxi. 1), and so the guilt and pollution remains upon the city. Thus *thou hast become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed*, v. 4. This crime is insisted most upon, for it was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin more than any; it is said to be that *which the Lord would not pardon*, 2 Kings xxiv. 4. (1.) The princes of Israel, who should have been the protectors of injured innocence, *every one were to their power to shed blood*, v. 6. They thirsted for it, and delighted in it, and whoever came within their power were sure to feel it; whoever lay at their mercy were sure to find none. (2.) There were those who *carried tales to shed blood*, v. 9. They told lies of men to the princes, to whom they knew it would be pleasing, to incense them against them; or they betrayed what passed in private conversation, to make mischief among neighbours, and set them together by the ears, to bite, and devour, and worry one another, even to death. Note, Those who, by giving invidious characters and telling ill-natured stories of their neighbours, sow discord among brethren, will be accountable for all the mischief that follows upon it; as he that kindles a fire will be accountable for all the hurt it does. (3.) There were those who *took gifts to shed blood* (v. 12), who would be hired with money to swear a man out of his life, or, if they were upon a jury, would be bribed to find an innocent man guilty. When so much barbarous bloody work of this kind was done in Jerusalem we may well conclude, [1.] That men's consciences had become wretchedly profligate and seared and their hearts hardened; for those would stick at no wickedness who would not stick at this. [2.] That abundance of quiet, harmless, good people were made away with, whereby, as the guilt

of the city was increased, so the number of those that should have stood in the gap to turn away the wrath of God was diminished.

2. Idolatry: *She makes idols against herself to destroy herself*, v. 3. And again (v. 4), *Thou hast defiled thyself in thy idols which thou hast made*. Note, Those who make idols for themselves will be found to have made them against themselves, for idolaters put a cheat upon themselves and prepare destruction for themselves; besides that thereby they pollute themselves, they render themselves odious in the eyes of the just and jealous God, and even *their mind and conscience are defiled*, so that to them *nothing is pure*. Those who did not make idols themselves were yet found guilty of *eating upon the mountains*, or high places (v. 9), in honour of the idols and in communion with idolaters.

3. Disobedience to parents (v. 7): *In thee have the children set light by their father and mother*, mocked them, cursed them, and despised to obey them, which was a sign of a more than ordinary corruption of nature as well as manners, and a disposition to all manner of disorder, Isa. iii. 5. Those that set light by their parents are in the highway to all wickedness. God had made many wholesome laws for the support of the paternal authority, but no care was taken to put them in execution; nay, the Pharisees in their day taught children, under pretence of respect to the Corban, to set light by their parents and refuse to maintain them, Matt. xv. 5.

4. Oppression and extortion. To enrich themselves they wronged the poor (v. 7): *They dealt by oppression and deceit with the stranger*, taking advantage of his necessities, and his ignorance of the laws and customs of the country. In Jerusalem, that should have been a sanctuary to the oppressed, *they vexed the fatherless and widows* by unreasonable demands and inquisitions, or troublesome law-suits, in which might prevails against right. "*Thou hast taken usury and increase* (v. 12); not only there are those in thee that do it, but thou hast done it." It was an act of the city or community; the public money, which should have been employed in public charity, was put out to usury, with extortion. *Thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by violence and wrong*. For neighbours to gain by one another in a way of fair trading is well, but those who are *greedy of gain* will not be held within the rules of equity.

5. Profanation of the sabbath and other holy things. This commonly goes along with the other sins for which they here stand indicted (v. 8): *Thou hast despised my holy things*, holy oracles, holy ordinances. The rites which God appointed were thought too plain, too ordinary; they despised them, and therefore were fond of the customs of the



heathen. Note, Immorality and dishonesty are commonly attended with a contempt of religion and the worship of God. *Thou hast profaned my sabbaths.* There was not in Jerusalem that face of sabbath-sanctification that one would have expected in the *holy city*. Sabbath-breaking is an iniquity that is an inlet to all iniquity. Many have owned it to contribute as much to their ruin as any thing.

6. Uncleaness and all manner of seventh-commandment sins, fruits of those vile affections to which God in a way of righteous judgment gives men up, to punish them for their idolatry and profanation of holy things. Jerusalem had been famous for its purity, but now *in the midst of thee they commit lewdness* (v. 9); lewdness goes bare-faced, though in the most scandalous instances, as that of a man's having his father's wife, which is the *discovery of the father's nakedness* (v. 10) and is a sin not to be named among Christians without the utmost detestation (1 Cor. v. 1), and was made a capital crime by the law of Moses, Lev. xx. 11. The time to *refrain from embracing* has not been observed (Eccl. iii. 6), *for they have humbled her that was set apart for her pollution.* They made nothing of committing lewdness with a neighbour's wife, with a daughter-in-law, or a sister, v. 11. And shall not God visit for these things?

7. Unmindfulness of God was at the bottom of all this wickedness (v. 12): "*Thou hast forgotten me*, else thou wouldst not have done thus." Note, Sinners do that which provokes God because they forget him; they forget their descent from him, dependence on him, and obligations to him; they forget how valuable his favour is, which they make themselves unfit for, and how formidable his wrath, which they make themselves obnoxious to. Those that *pervert their ways forget the Lord their God*, Jer. iii. 21.

II. He is to pass sentence upon Jerusalem for these crimes.

1. Let her know that she has filled up the measure of her iniquity, and that her sins are such as forbid delays and call for speedy vengeance. She has made *her time to come* (v. 3), *her days to draw near*; and she has come to her years of maturity for punishment (v. 4), as an heir that has come to age and is ready for his inheritance. God would have borne longer with them, but they had arrived at such a pitch of impudence in sin that God could not in honour give them a further day. Note, Abused patience will at last be weary of forbearing. And, when sinners (as Solomon speaks) grow *overmuch wicked*, they die before their time (Eccl. vii. 17) and shorten their reprieves.

2. Let her know that she has exposed herself, and therefore God has justly exposed her, to the contempt and scorn of all her neighbours (v. 4): *I have made thee a reproach to the heathen*, both those who are

near, who are eye-witnesses of Jerusalem's apostasy and degeneracy, and those afar off, who, though at a distance, will think it worth taking notice of (v. 5); they shall all mock thee. While they were reproached by their neighbours for their adherence to God it was their honour, and they might be sure that God would roll away their reproach. But, now that they are laughed at for their revolt from God, they must lie down in their shame, and must say, *The Lord is righteous.* They make a mock at Jerusalem, both because her sins had been very scandalous (she is infamous, polluted in name, and has quite lost her credit), and because her punishment is very grievous—she is much vexed and frets without measure at her troubles. Note, Those who fret most at their troubles have commonly those about them who will be so much the more apt to make a jest of them.

3. Let her know that God is displeased, highly displeased, at her wickedness, and does and will witness against it (v. 13): *I have smitten my hand at thy dishonest gain.* God, both by his prophets and by his providence, revealed his wrath from heaven against their *ungodliness and unrighteousness*, the oppressions they were guilty of, though they got by them, and their murders (the blood which has been in the midst of thee), and all their other sins. Note, God has sufficiently discovered how angry he is at the wicked courses of his people; and, that they may not say that they have not had fair warning, he smites his hand against the sin before he lays his hand upon the sinner. And this is a good reason why we should despise dishonest gain, even the gain of oppressions, and shake our hands from holding bribes, because these are sins against which God shakes his hands, Isa. xxxiii. 15.

4. Let her know that, proud and secure as she is, she is no match for God's judgments, v. 14. (1.) She is assured that the destruction she has deserved will come: *I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it.* He that is true to his promises will be true to his threatenings too, for he is not a man that he should repent. (2.) It is supposed that she thinks herself able to contend with God, and to stand a siege against his judgments. She bade defiance to the day of the Lord, Isa. v. 19. But, (3.) She is convinced of her utter inability to make her part good with him: "*Can thy heart endure, or can thy hand be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?*" Thou thinkest thou hast to do only with men like thyself, but shalt be made to know that thou fallest into the hands of a living God." Observe here, [1.] There is a day coming when God will deal with sinners, a day of visitation. He deals with some to bring them to repentance, and there is no resisting the force of convictions when he sets them on; he deals with others to bring them to ruin. He deals with sinners in this life, when he brings upon them his

sore judgments; but the days of eternity are especially the days in which God will deal with them, when the full vials of God's wrath will be poured out without mixture. [2.] The wrath of God against sinners, when he comes to deal with them, will be found both intolerable and irresistible. There is no heart stout enough to endure it; it is none of the infirmities which *the spirit of a man will sustain*. Damned sinners can neither forget nor despise their torments, nor have they any thing wherewith to support themselves under their torments. There are no hands strong enough either to ward off the strokes of God's wrath or to break the chains with which sinners are bound over to the day of wrath. *Who knows the power of God's anger?*

5. Let her know that, since she has walked in the way of the heathen, and learned their works, she shall have enough of them (v. 15): "*I will not only send thee among the heathen, out of thy own land, but I will scatter thee among them and disperse thee in the countries, to be abused and insulted over by strangers.*" And since her *filthiness* and *filthy ones* continued in her, notwithstanding all the methods God had taken to *refine* her (she would not be made clean, Jer. xiii. 27), he will by his judgments consume her *filthiness out of her*; he will destroy those that are incurably bad and reform those that are inclined to be good.

6. Let her know that God has disowned her and cast her off. He had been her heritage and portion; but now (v. 16), "*Thou shalt take thy inheritance in thyself, shift for thyself, make the best hand thou canst for thyself, for God will no longer undertake for thee.*" Note, Those that give up themselves to be ruled by their lusts will justly be given up to be portioned by them. Those that resolve to be their own masters, let them expect no other comfort and happiness than what their own hands can furnish them with, and a miserable portion it will prove. *Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. Thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things.* These are the same with this, "*Thou shalt take thy inheritance in thyself, and then, when it is too late, shalt own in the sight of the heathen that I am the Lord, who alone am a portion sufficient for my people.*" Note, Those that have lost their interest in God will know how to value it.

17 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 18 Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are *even* the dross of silver. 19 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 As

they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather *you* in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave *you there*, and melt you. 21 Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. 22 As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you.

The same melancholy string is still harped upon, and various turns are given it, to make it affecting, that it may be influencing. The prophet must here show, or at least it is here shown him, that the whole house of Israel has become as dross and that as dross they shall be consumed. What David has said concerning the wicked ones of the world is here said concerning the wicked ones of the church, now that it is corrupt and degenerate (Ps. cxix. 119): *Thou putttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross.*

1. See here how the wretched degeneracy of the house of Israel is described. That state, in David's and Solomon's time, had been a *head of gold*; when the kingdoms were divided it was as the *arms of silver*. But now, 1. It has degenerated into baser metal, of no value in comparison with what it formerly was: *They are all brass, and tin, and iron, and lead*, which some make to signify divers sorts of sinners among them. Their being brass denotes the impudence of some in their wickedness; they are *brazen-faced*, and cannot blush; their *shoes* had been *iron and brass* (Deut. xxxiii. 25), but now their brow is so, Isa. xlviii. 4. Their being tin denotes the hypocritical profession of piety with which many of them cover their iniquity; they have a specious show, but no intrinsic worth. Their being iron denotes the cruel disposition of some, and their delight in war, according to the character of the *iron age*. Their being lead denotes their dulness, sottishness, and stupidity: though soft and pliable to evil, yet heavy and not movable to good. *How has the gold become dross! How has the most fine gold changed!* So is Jerusalem's degeneracy bewailed, Lam. iv. 1. Yet this is not the worst; these metals, though of less value, are yet of good use. But, 2. The house of Israel has become dross to me. So she is in God's account, whatever she is in her own and her neighbours' account. They were silver, but now they are *even the dross of silver*; the word signifies all the dirt, and rubbish, and worthless stuff, that are separated from the silver in the washing, melting, and refining of it.



Note, Sinners, and especially degenerate professors, are in God's account as dross, vile, and contemptible, and of no account, as the *evil figs which could not be eaten, they were so evil*. They are useless and fit for nothing; of no consistency with themselves and no service to man.

II. How the woeful destruction of this degenerate house of Israel is foretold. They are all gathered together in Jerusalem; thither people fled from all parts of the country as to a city of refuge, not only because it was a strong city, but because it was the holy city. Now God tells them that their flocking into Jerusalem, which they intended for their security, should be as the gathering of various sorts of metal into the furnace or crucible, to be melted down, and to have the dross separated from them. They are *in the midst of Jerusalem*, surrounded by the forces of the enemy; and, being thus enclosed, 1. The *fire of God's wrath* shall be kindled upon this furnace, and it shall be *blown*, to make it burn fiercely and strongly, v. 20, 21. God will *gather them in his anger and fury*. The blowing of the fire makes a great noise, so will the judgments of God upon Jerusalem. When God stirs up himself to execute judgments upon a provoking people, from the consideration of his own glory and the necessity of making some examples, then he may be said to *blow the fire of his wrath* against sin and sinners, to *heat the furnace seven times hotter*. 2. The several sorts of metal gathered in it shall be melted; by a complication of judgments, as by a raging fire, their constitution shall be dissolved, they shall lose all their former shape and strength, and shall be utterly unable to stand before the wrath of God. The various sorts of sinners shall be melted down together, and united in a common overthrow, as *brass and lead* in the same furnace, as trees are *bound in bundles for the fire*. They came together into Jerusalem as a place of defence, but God brought them together there as unto a place of execution. 3. God will leave them in the furnace (v. 20): *I will gather you into the furnace and will leave you there*. When God brings his own people into the furnace he sits by them, as the refiner by his gold, to see that they be not continued there any longer than is fitting and needful; but he will bring these people into the furnace, as men throw dross into it, which they design shall be consumed, and therefore are in no care about it, but *leave it there*. Compare with this Hos. v. 14, *I will tear and go away*. 4. Hereby the dross shall be wholly separated and the good metal purified, the impenitent shall be destroyed and the penitent reformed and fitted for deliverance. *Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer*, Prov. xxv. 4. This judgment shall do that in the house of Israel for the doing of which other methods had been tried in vain, and repro-

bate silver shall they no more be called, Jer. vi. 30.

23 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 24 Son of man, say unto her, *Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation*. 25 *There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof*. 26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in the midst thereof *are* like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, *and* to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. 28 And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken. 29 The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. 30 And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. 31 Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God.

Here is, I. A general idea given of the land of Israel, how well it deserved the judgments coming to destroy it and how much it needed these judgments to refine it. Let the prophet tell her plainly, "*Thou art the land that is not cleansed*, not refined as metal is, and therefore needest to be again put into the furnace. Means and methods of reformation have been ineffectual; thou art *not rained upon in the day of indignation*." This was one of the judgments which God brought upon them in the day of his wrath, he *withheld the rain* from them, Jer. xiv. 4. Or,

"When thou art under the tokens of God's displeasure, even in the day of indignation thou art *not rained upon*; thou hast not received instruction by the prophets, whose doctrine is said to *descend as the rain*." Or, "When thou art corrected thou art not cleansed; thy filth is not carried away as that in the streets is by a sweeping rain. Nay, though it be a *day of indignation* with thee, yet thy filthiness, which should be done away, has become more *offensive*, as that of a city is in dry weather, when it is not rained upon." Or, "Thou hast nothing to refresh and comfort thyself with *in the day of indignation*; thou art not rained upon by divine consolations." So the rich man in torment had not a *drop of water*, or rain, to *cool his tongue*.

II. A particular charge drawn up against the several orders and degrees of men among them, which shows that they had all helped to fill the measure of the nation's guilt, but none had done any thing towards the emptying of it; they are therefore all alike.

1. They have every one *corrupted his way*, and those who should have been the brightest examples of virtue were ringleaders in iniquity and patterns of vice.

(1.) The *prophets*, who pretended to make known the mind of God to them, were not only *deceivers*, but *devourers* (v. 25), and hardened them in their wickedness both by their preaching, wherein they promised them impunity and prosperity, and by their conversation, in which they were as profligate as any. *There is a conspiracy of her prophets* against God and religion, against the true prophets and all good men; they conspired together to be all in one song, as Ahab's prophets were, to assure them of peace in their sinful ways. Note, The unity which is found among pretenders to infallibility, and which they so much boast of, is only the result of a secret conspiracy against the truth. Satan is *not divided against himself*. The prophets are *in conspiracy* with the murderers and oppressors, to patronise and protect them in their wickedness, and justify what they did with their false prophecies, provided they may come in sharers with them in the profits of it. They are like a *roaring lion ravening the prey*; they thunder out threats against those whose ruin is aimed at, terrify them, or make them odious to the people, and so make themselves masters, [1.] Of their lives: *They have devoured souls*, have been accessory to the shedding of the blood of many an innocent person, and so have made many to become sorrowful widows who were comfortable wives. They have persecuted those to death who witnessed against their pretensions to prophecy and would not be imposed upon by their counterfeit commission. Or, *They devoured souls* by flattering sinners into a false peace and a vain hope, and seducing them into the paths of sin, which would be their eternal ruin. Note, Those who draw

men to wickedness, and encourage them in it, are the devourers and murderers of their souls. [2.] Of their estates. When Naboth is slain they take possession of his vineyard; *They have seized the treasure and precious things*, as forfeited; some way or other they had of *devouring the widows' houses*, as the Pharisees, Matt. xxiii. 14. Or, *They got this treasure*, and all these *precious things*, as fees for false and flattering prophecies; for *he that puts not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him*, Mic. iii. 5. It was sad with Jerusalem when such men as these passed for prophets.

(2.) The priests, who were teachers by office, and had the custody of the sacred things, and should have called the false prophets to account, were as bad as they, v. 26. [1.] They violated the law of God, which they should have observed and taught others to observe. They made no conscience of the law of the priesthood, but openly broke it, and with contempt, as Hophni and Phinehas. They did what they had a mind, with an express *non obstante*—*notwithstanding* to the word of God. And how should those teach the people their duty who lived in contradiction to their own? [2.] They *profaned God's holy things*, about which they were to minister, and which they ought to have restrained others from the profanation of. They suffered those to eat of the holy things who were unqualified by the law. The table of the Lord was contemptible with them. By dealing in holy things with such unhallowed hands they did themselves profane them. [3.] They did not themselves put a difference, nor did they show the people how to *put a difference, between the holy and profane, the clean and the unclean*, according to the directions and distinctions of the law. They did not exclude those from God's courts who were excluded by the law, nor teach the people to observe the difference the law had made between food clean and unclean, between times and places holy and common; but they lived at large themselves and encouraged the people to do so too. [4.] They *hid their eyes from God's sabbaths*; they took no care about them; it was all one to them whether God's sabbaths were kept holy or no; they neither gave countenance to those who observed them nor check to those who profaned them, nor did they themselves show any regard to them or veneration for them. They winked at those who did servile works on that day, and looked another way when they should have inspected the behaviour of the people on sabbath days. God's sabbaths have such a beauty and glory put upon them by the divine institution as may command respect; but they *hid their eyes* from them and would not see that excellency in them. [5.] By all this God himself was *profaned among them*; his authority was slighted, his goodness made light of, and the highest affront and contempt imaginable were put upon his holiness. Note,



The profanation of the honour of the scriptures, of sabbaths and sacred things, is a profanation of the honour of God himself, who is interested in them.

(3.) The princes, who should have interposed with their authority to redress these grievances, were as daring transgressors of the law as any (v. 27): *They are like wolves ravening the prey*; for such is power without justice and goodness to direct it. All their business was to gratify, [1.] Their own pride and ambition, by making themselves arbitrary and formidable. [2.] Their own malice and revenge, by *shedding blood and destroying souls*, sacrificing to their cruelty all those that stood in their way or had in any thing disobliged them. [3.] Their own avarice; all they aim at is to *get dishonest gain*, by crushing and oppressing their subjects. *Lucrum bonus est odor ex re qualibet. Rem, rem, quocunque modo rem—Sweet is the odour of gain, from whatever substance it ascends. Money, money, by fairness or by fraud, get money.* But, though they had power sufficient to carry them on in their oppressive courses, yet how could they answer it both to their credit and to their consciences? We are told how (v. 28): The prophets *daubed them with untempered mortar*, told them in God's name (horrid wickedness!) that there was no harm in what they did, that they might dispose of the lives and estates of their subjects as they pleased, and could do no wrong, nay, that in prosecuting such and such whom they had marked out they did God service; and thus they stopped the mouth of their consciences. They also justified what they did, to the people, nay, and *magnified it* as if it were all for the public good, and so saved their reputation, and kept their oppressed subjects from murmuring. Note, Daubing prophets are the great supporters of ravening princes, but will prove at last their great deceivers, for they daub with untempered mortar which will not hold, nor will the wall stand long that is built up with it. They pretend to be seers, but they *see vanity*; they pretend to be diviners, but they *divine lies*; they pretend a warrant from Heaven for what they say, and that it is all as true as gospel; they say, *Thus saith the Lord God*, but it is all a sham, for *the Lord has not spoken any such thing*.

(4.) The people that had any power in their hands learned of their princes to abuse it, v. 29. Those that should have complained of the oppression of the subject, and have put in a *claim of rights* on behalf of the injured, that should have stood up for liberty and property, were themselves invaders of them: *The people of the land have used oppression and exercised robbery.* The rich oppress the poor, masters their servants, landlords their tenants, and even parents their own children; nay, the buyers and sellers will find some way to oppress one another. This is such a sin as, when it is

national, is indeed a national judgment, and is threatened as such. Isa. iii. 5, *The people shall be oppressed every one by his neighbour.* It is an aggravation of the sin that they have *veiled the poor and needy*, whom they should have relieved, and have *oppressed the stranger* and deprived him of *his right*, to whom they ought to have been not only just, but kind. Thus was the apostasy universal and the disease epidemical.

2. There is none that appears as an intercessor for them (v. 30): *I sought for a man among them that should stand in the gap, but I found none.* Note, (1.) Sin makes a gap in the hedge of protection that is about a people at which good things run out from them and evil things pour in upon them, a gap by which God enters to destroy them. (2.) There is a way of standing in the gap, and making up the breach against the judgments of God, by repentance, and prayer, and reformation. Moses stood in the gap when he made intercession for Israel *to turn away the wrath of God*, Ps. cvi. 23. (3.) When God is coming forth against a sinful people to destroy them he expects some to intercede for them, and enquires if there be but one that does; so much is it his desire and delight to show mercy. If there be but a man that stands in the gap, as Abraham for Sodom, he will discover him and be well pleased with him. (4.) It bodes ill to a people when judgments are breaking in upon them, and the spirit of prayer is restrained, so that *not one is found* that will either give them a good word or speak a good word for them. (5.) When it is so, what can be expected but utter ruin? *Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them* (v. 31), have given it full scope, that it may come upon them in a full stream; yet, whatever God's wrath inflicts upon a people, it is *their own way* that is therein *recompensed upon their heads*, and God deals with them no worse, but even much better, than their iniquity deserves.

#### CHAP. XXIII.

This long chapter (as before, ch. xvi. and xx.) is a history of the apostasies of God's people from him and the aggravations of those apostasies under the similitude of corporal whoredom and adultery. Here the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the ten tribes and the two, with their capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem, are considered distinctly. Here is, I. The apostasy of Israel and Samaria from God (ver. 1—8) and their ruin for it, ver. 9, 10. II. The apostasy of Judah and Jerusalem from God (ver. 11—21) and sentence passed upon them, that they shall in like manner be destroyed for it, ver. 22—35. III. The joint wickedness of them both together (ver. 36—44) and the joint ruin of them both, ver. 45—49. And all that is written for warning against the sins of idolatry, and confidence in an arm of flesh, and sinful leagues and confederacies with wicked people (which are the sins here meant by committing whoredom), is that others may hear and fear, and not sin after the similitude of the transgressions of Israel and Judah.

THE word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: 3 And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they



bruised the teats of their virginity. 4 And the names of them *were* Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus *were* their names; Samaria *is* Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah. 5 And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians *her* neighbours, 6 *Which were* clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. 7 Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them *that were* the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself. 8 Neither left she her whoredoms *brought* from Egypt: for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredom upon her. 9 Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. 10 These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women; for they had executed judgment upon her.

God had often spoken to Ezekiel, and by him to the people, to this effect, but now his word comes again; for God speaks the same thing *once, yea, twice, yea, many a time, and all little enough, and too little, for man perceives it not.* Note, To convince sinners of the evil of sin, and of their misery and danger by reason of it, there is need of *line upon line*, so loth we are to know the worst of ourselves. The sinners that are here to be exposed are *two women*, two kingdoms, sister-kingdoms, Israel and Judah, *daughters of one mother*, having been for a long time but *one people*. Solomon's kingdom was so large, so populous, that immediately after his death it divided into two. Observe, 1. Their character when they were one (v. 3): *They committed whoredoms in Egypt*, for there they were guilty of idolatry, as we read before, ch. xx. 8. The representing of those sins which are most provoking to God and most ruining to a people by the sin of whoredom plainly intimates what an exceedingly sinful sin uncleanness is, how offensive, how destructive. Doubtless it is itself one of the worst of sins, for the worst of other sins are compared to it here and often elsewhere, which should increase our detestation and dread of all manner of *fleshy lusts*, all appearances

of them and approaches to them, as *warring against the soul*, infatuating sinners, bewitching them, alienating their minds from God and all that is good, debauching conscience, rendering them odious in the eyes of the pure and holy God, and drowning them at last in destruction and perdition. 2. Their names when they became two, v. 4. The kingdom of Israel is called the *elder sister*, because that first made the breach, and separated from the family both of kings and priests that God had appointed—the *greater sister* (so the word is), for ten tribes belonged to that kingdom and only two to the other. God says of them both, *They were mine*, for they were the seed of Abraham *his friend* and of Jacob *his chosen*; they were in covenant with God, and carried about with them the sign of *their circumcision*, the seal of the covenant. *They were mine*; and therefore their apostasy was the highest injustice. It was alienating God's property, it was the basest ingratitude to the best of benefactors, and a perfidious treacherous violation of the most sacred engagements. Note, Those who have been in profession the people of God, but have revolted from him, have a great deal to answer for more than those who never made any such profession. "*They were mine*; they were espoused to me, and to me *they bore sons and daughters*;" there were many among them that were devoted to God's honour, and employed in his service, and were the strength and beauty of these kingdoms, as children are of the families they are born in. In this parable Samaria and the kingdom of Israel shall bear the name of *Aholah—her own tabernacle*, because the places of worship which that kingdom had were of their own devising, their own choosing, and the worship itself was their own invention; God never owned it. *Her tabernacle to herself* (so some render it); "let her take it to herself, and make her best of it." Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah bear the name of *Aholibah—my tabernacle is in her*, because *their temple* was the place which God himself had *chosen to put his name there*. He acknowledged it to be his, and honoured them with the tokens of his presence in it. Note, Of those that stand in relation to God, and make profession of his name, some have greater privileges and advantages than others; and, as those who have greater are thereby rendered the more inexcusable if they revolt from God, so those who have less will not thereby be rendered excusable. 3. The treacherous departure of the kingdom of Israel from God (v. 5): *Aholah played the harlot when she was mine*. Though the ten tribes had deserted the house of David, yet God owned them for *his still*; though Jeroboam, in setting up the golden calves, *sinned, and made Israel to sin*, yet, as long as they worshipped the God of Israel only, though by images, he did not quite cast them off. But the way



of sin is down-hill. Aholah played the harlot, brought in the worship of Baal (1 Kings xvi. 31), set up that other god, that dunghill-god, in competition with Jehovah (1 Kings xviii. 21), as a vile adulteress *dotes on her lovers*, because they are well dressed and make a figure, because they are young and handsome (v. 6), *clothed with blue, captains and rulers, desirable young men*, genteel, and that pass for men of honour, so she doted upon her neighbours, particularly the Assyrians, who had extended their conquests near them; she admired their idols and worshipped them, admired the pomp of their courts and their military strength and courted alliances with them upon any terms, as if her own God were not sufficient to be depended upon. We find one of the kings of Israel giving a *thousand talents to the king of Assyria*, to engage him in his interests, 2 Kings xv. 19. She doted on the *chosen men of Assyria*, as worthy to be trusted and employed in the service of the state (v. 7), and *on all their idols with which she defiled herself*. Note, Whatever creature we dote upon, pay homage to, and put a confidence in, we make an idol of that creature; and whatever we make an idol of we defile ourselves with. And now again the conviction looks back as far as the original of their nation: *Neither left she her whoredoms which she brought from Egypt, v. 8*. Their being idolaters in Egypt was a thing never to be forgotten—that they should be in love with Egypt's idols even when they were continually in fear of Egypt's tyrants and task-masters! But (as some have observed) therefore, at that time, when Satan boasted of his having *walked through the earth* as all his own, to disprove his pretensions God did not say, *Hast thou considered my people Israel in Egypt?* (for they had become idolaters, and were not to be boasted of), but, *Hast thou considered my servant Job in the land of Uz?* And this corrupt disposition in them, when they were first formed into a people, is an emblem of that original corruption which is born with us and is woven into our constitution, a strong bias towards the world and the flesh, like that in the Israelites towards idolatry; it was *bred in the bone* with them, and was charged upon them long after, that they *left not their whoredoms brought from Egypt*. It would never *out of the flesh*, though Egypt had been a house of bondage to them. Thus the corrupt affections and inclinations which we brought into the world with us we have not lost, nor got clear of, but still retain them, though the iniquity we were born in was the source of all the calamities which human life is liable to. 4 The destruction of the kingdom of Israel for their apostasy from God (v. 9, 10): *I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers*. God first justly gave her up to her lust (*Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone*), and then gave her up to her lovers. The neighbouring nations,

whose idolatries she had conformed to and whose friendship she had confided in, and in both had affronted God, are now made use of as the instruments of her destruction. *The Assyrians, on whom she doted*, soon spied out the *nakedness of the land*, discovered her blind side, on which to attack her, stripped her of all her ornaments and all her defences, and so *uncovered her*, and *made her naked and bare*, carried her sons and daughters into captivity, *slew her with the sword*, and quite destroyed that kingdom and put an end to it. We have the story at large 2 Kings xvii. 6, &c., where the cause of the ruin of that once flourishing kingdom by the Assyrians is shown to be their forsaking the God of Israel, *fearing other gods, and walking in the statutes of the heathen*; it was for this that God was very angry with them and removed them out of his sight, v. 18. And that the Assyrians, whom they had been so fond of, should be employed in *executing judgments* upon them was very remarkable, and shows how God, in a way of righteous judgment, often makes that a scourge to sinners which they have inordinately set their hearts upon. The devil will for ever be a tormentor to those impenitent sinners who now hearken to him and comply with him as a tempter. Thus Samaria became *famous among women, or infamous* rather; she became a name (so the word is); not only she came to be the subject of discourse, and much talked of, as the desolations of cities and kingdoms fill the newspapers, but she was thus ruined for her idolatries in *terrorem*—for warning to all people to take heed of doing likewise; as the public execution of notorious malefactors makes them such a name, such an ill name, as may serve to frighten others from those wicked courses which have brought them to a miserable and shameful end. Deut. xxi. 21, *All Israel shall hear and fear*.

11 And when her sister Aholibah saw *this*, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in *her whoredoms*. 12 She doted upon the Assyrians *her neighbours*, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 Then I saw that she was defiled, *that they took both one way*, 14 And *that* she increased her whoredoms: for when she saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, 15 Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of

Chaldea, the land of their nativity : 16 And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea. 17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them. 18 So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness : then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister. 19 Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt. 20 For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh *is as* the flesh of asses, and whose issue *is like* the issue of horses. 21 Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth.

The prophet Hosea, in his time, observed that the two tribes retained their integrity, in a great measure, when the ten tribes had apostatized (Hos. xi. 12, *Ephraim indeed compasses me about with lies, but Judah yet rules with God and is faithful with the saints* ; and this was justly expected from them : Hos. iv. 15, *Though thou Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend*) ; but this lasted not long. By some unhappy matches made between the house of David and the house of Ahab the worship of Baal had been brought into the kingdom of Judah, but had been by the reforming kings worked out again ; and at the time of the captivity of the ten tribes, which was in the reign of Hezekiah, things were in a good posture : but it lasted not long. In the reign of Manasseh, soon after the kingdom of Judah had seen the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, they became more corrupt than Israel had been in their inordinate love of idols, v. 11. Instead of being made better by the warning which that destruction gave them, they were made worse by it, as if they were *displeased because the Lord had made that breach upon Israel*, and for that reason became disaffected to him and to his service. Instead of being made to stand in awe of him as a *jealous God*, they therefore grew strange to him, and liked those gods better that would admit of partners with them. Note, Those may justly expect God's judgments upon themselves who do not take warning by his judgments upon others, who see in others what is the end of sin and yet continue to make a light matter of it. But it is bad indeed with those who are made worse by

that which should make them better, and have their lusts irritated and exasperated by that which was designed to suppress and subdue them. Jerusalem grew worse in her whoredoms than her sister Samaria had been in her whoredoms. This was observed before (ch. xvi. 51), *Neither has Samaria committed half of thy sins*.

1. Jerusalem, that had been a *faithful city*, became a *harlot*, Isa. i. 21. She also doted upon the Assyrians (v. 12), joined in league with them, joined in worship with them, grew to be in love with their *captains and rulers*, and cried them up as finer and more accomplished gentlemen than any that ever the land of Israel produced. "See how richly, how neatly, they are dressed, *clothed most gorgeously* ; how well they sit a horse ; they are *horsemen riding on horses* ; how charmingly they look, *all of them desirable young men*." And thus they grew to affect every thing that was foreign and to despise their own nation ; and even the religion of it was mean and homely, and not to be compared with the curiosity and gaiety of the heathen temples. Thus she *increased her whoredoms* ; she fell in love, fell in league, with the Chaldeans. Hezekiah himself was faulty this way when he was proud of the court which the king of Babylon made to him and complimented his ambassadors with the sight of all his treasures, Isa. xxxix.

2. And the humour increased (v. 14) ; she doted upon the pictures of the Babylonian captains (v. 15, 16), joined in alliance with that kingdom, invited them to come and settle in Jerusalem, that they might refine the genius of the Jewish nation and make it more polite ; nay, they sent for patterns of their images, altars, and temples, and made use of them in their worship. Thus was she *polluted with her whoredoms* (v. 17), and thereby she *discovered her own whoredom* (v. 18), her own strong inclination to idolatry. And when she had had enough of the Chaldeans, and grew tired of them and disposed to break her league with them, as Jehoiakim and Zedekiah did, *her mind being alienated from them*, she courted the *Egyptians*, doted upon their paramours (v. 20), would come into an alliance with them, and, to strengthen the alliance, would join with them in their idolatries and then depend upon them to be their protectors from all other nations ; for so wise, so rich, so strong, was the Egyptian nation, and came to such perfection in idolatry, that there was no nation now which they could take such satisfaction in as in Egypt. Thus they called to remembrance the days of their youth (v. 19), the lewdness of their youth, v. 21. 1. They pleased themselves with the remembrance of it. When they began to set their affections upon Egypt, they encouraged themselves to put a confidence in that kingdom, because of the old acquaintance they had with it, as if they still retained the gust and



relish of the *leeks and onions* they ate there, or rather of the idolatrous worship they learned there, and brought up with them thence. When they began an acquaintance with Egypt they remembered how merrily their fathers worshipped the golden calf, what music and dancing they had at that sport, which they learned in Egypt; and they hoped they should now have a fair pretence to come to that again. Thus *she multiplied her whoredoms*, repeated her former whoredoms, and encouraged herself to close with present temptations, by calling to *remembrance the days of her youth*. Note, Those who, instead of reflecting upon their former sins with sorrow and shame, reflect upon them with pleasure and pride, contract new guilt thereby, strengthen their own corruptions, and in effect bid defiance to repentance. This is returning *with the dog to his vomit*. 2. They called it *God's remembrance*, and provoked him to remember it against them. God had said indeed that he would reckon with them for the *golden calf*, that *idol of Egypt* (Exod. xxxii. 34); but such was his patience that he seemed to have forgotten it till they, by their league now with the Egyptians against the Chaldeans, did, as it were, put him in mind of it; and in the day when he visits he will now, as he has said, *visit for that*. It is very observable how this adulteress changes her lovers: she dotes first on the Assyrians; then she thought the Chaldeans finer and courted them; after a while her mind was alienated from them, and she thought the Egyptians more powerful (v. 20) and she must contract an intimacy with them. This shows the folly, (1.) Of fleshly lusts; when they are indulged they grow humoursome and fickle, are soon surfeited but never satisfied; they must have variety, and what is loved one day is loathed the next. *Unius adulterium matrimonium vocant*—One adultery is called marriage, as Seneca observes. (2.) Of idolatry. Those who think one God too little will not think a hundred sufficient, but will still be for trying more, as finding all insufficient. (3.) Of seeking to creatures for help; we go from one to another, but are disappointed in them all, and can never rest till we have made the God of Israel our help.

II. The faithful God justly gives a bill of divorce to this now faithless city, that has become a *harlot*. His jealousy soon discovered her lewdness (v. 13): *I saw that she was defiled*, that she was debauched, and saw which way her inclination was, that the *two sisters both took one way*, and that Jerusalem grew worse than Samaria. For, *if we stretch out our hand to a strange god, will not God search this out?* No doubt he will; and when he has found it can he be pleased with it? No (v. 18): *Then my mind was alienated from her, as it was from her sister*. How could the pure and holy God any longer take delight in such a lewd generation? Note,

Sin alienates God's mind from the sinner, and justly, for it is the alienation of the sinner's mind from God; but woe, and a thousand woes, to those from whom God's mind is alienated; for whom he turns from he will turn against.

22 Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side; 23 The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses. 24 And they shall come against thee with chariots, waggons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, *which* shall set against thee buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments. 25 And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire. 26 They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels. 27 Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. 28 For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of *them* whom thou hatest, into the hand of *them* from whom thy mind is alienated: 29 And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms. 30 I will do these *things* unto thee, because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen, and because thou art polluted with their idols. 31 Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into



thine hand. 32 Thus saith the Lord God; Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much. 33 Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria. 34 Thou shalt even drink it and suck *it* out, and thou shalt break the sherds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts: for I have spoken *it*, saith the Lord God. 35 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

Jerusalem stands indicted by the name of *Aholibah*, for that she, as a false traitor to her sovereign Lord the God of heaven, not having his fear before her eyes, but moved by the instigation of the devil, had revolted from her allegiance to him, had compassed and imagined to shake off his government, had kept up a correspondence and joined in confederacy with his enemies, and the pretenders to a deity, in contempt of his crown and dignity. To this indictment she has pleaded, Not guilty: *I am not polluted; I have not gone after Baalim*. But it is found against her by the notorious evidence of the fact, and she stands convicted of it, nor has any thing material to offer why judgment should not be given and execution awarded according to law. In these verses, therefore, we have the sentence.

I. Her old confederates must be her executioners; and those whom she had courted to be her leaders in sin are now to be employed as instruments of her punishment (v. 22): "*I will raise up thy lovers against thee*, the Chaldeans, whom formerly thou didst so much admire and covet an acquaintance with, but from whom thy mind is since alienated and with whom thou hast perfidiously broken covenant." They are called *thy lovers* (v. 22) and yet (v. 28) *those whom thou hatest*. Note, It is common for sinful love soon to turn into hatred; as Amnon's to Tamar. Those of headstrong and unreasonable passions are often very hot against those persons and things that a little before they were as hot for. Fools run into extremes; nay, and wise men may see cause to change their sentiments. And therefore, as we should rejoice and weep as if we rejoiced not and wept not, so we should love and hate as if we loved not and hated not. *Ita ama tanquam osurus—Love as one who may have cause to feel aversion*.

II. The execution to be done upon her is very terrible.

1. Her enemies shall come against her *on every side* (v. 22), those of the several nations that constituted the Chaldean army (v. 23), all of them *great lords and renowned*, whose pomp, and grandeur, and splendid appearance made them look the more amiable when they came as friends to protect and patronise Jerusalem, but the more formidable when they came to chastise its treachery and aimed at no less than its ruin.

(1.) They shall come with a great deal of military force (v. 24), with *chariots and wag-gons* furnished with all necessary provisions for a camp, with arms and ammunition, bag and baggage, with a vast army, and well armed. (2.) They shall have justice on their side: "*I will set judgment before them*" (they shall have right with them as well as might; for the king of Babylon had just cause to make war upon the king of Judah, because he had broken his league with him), "and therefore they shall judge thee, not only according to God's judgments, as the instruments of his justice, to punish thee for the indignities done to him, but according to their judgments, according to the law of nations, to punish thee for thy perfidious dealings with them."

(3.) They shall prosecute the war with a great deal of fury and resentment. It being a war of revenge, *they shall deal with thee hatefully*, v. 29. This will make the execution the more severe that their swords will be dipped in poison. Thou hatest them, and they shall deal hatefully with thee; those that hate will be hated and will be hatefully dealt with. (4.) God himself will lead them on, and his anger shall be mingled with theirs (v. 25): *I will set my jealousy against thee*; that shall kindle this fire, and then *they shall deal furiously with thee*. If men deal ever so hatefully, ever so furiously, with us, yet, if we have God on our side, we need not fear them; they can do us no real hurt. But if men deal furiously with us, and God set his jealousy against us too, what will become of us?

2. The particulars of the sentence here passed upon this notorious adulteress are, (1.) That all she has shall be seized on. The *clothes* and the *fair jewels*, with which she had endeavoured to recommend herself to her lovers, these she shall be stripped of, v. 26. All those things that were the ornaments of their state shall be taken away:

"*They shall take away all thy labour*, all that thou hast gotten by thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare," v. 29. Both city and country shall be impoverished and all the wealth of both swept away. (2.) That her children shall go into captivity. "*They shall take thy sons and thy daughters*, and make slaves of them (v. 25); for they are *children of whoredoms*, unworthy the dignities and privileges of Israelites," Hos. ii.

4. (3.) That she shall be stigmatized and deformed: "*They shall take away thy nose and thy ears* shall mark thee for a harlot,



and render thee for ever odious," v. 25. This intimates the many cruelties of the Chaldean soldiers towards the Jews that fell into their hands, whom, it is probable, they used barbarously. Some will have this to be understood figuratively; and by the nose they think is meant the kingly dignity, and by the ears that of the priesthood. (4.) That she shall be exposed to shame: *Thy lewdness and thy whoredoms shall be discovered* (v. 29), as, when a malefactor is punished, all his crimes are ripped up, and repeated to his disgrace; what was secret then comes to light, and what was done long since is then called to mind. (5.) That she shall be quite cut off and ruined: "The remnant of thy people that have escaped the famine and pestilence shall fall *by the sword*; and the residue of thy houses that have not been battered down about thy ears shall be *devoured by the fire*," v. 25. And this shall be the end of Jerusalem.

III. Because she has trod in the steps of Samaria's sins, she must expect no other than Samaria's fate. It is common, in giving judgment, to have an eye to precedents; so has God in passing this sentence on Jerusalem (v. 31, &c.): "*Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister*, notwithstanding the warning thou hast had given thee, by the fatal consequences of her wickedness; and therefore *I will give her cup*, her portion of miseries, *into thy hand*, the cup of the Lord's fury, which will be to thee a *cup of trembling*." Now, 1. This cup is said to be *deep and large*, and to *contain much* (v. 32), abundance of God's wrath and abundance of miseries, the fruits of that wrath. It is such a cup as that which we read of, Jer. xxv. 15, 16. The cup of divine vengeance holds a great deal, and so those will find into whose hand it shall be put. 2. They shall be made to drink the very dregs of this cup, as the *wicked* are said to do (Ps. lxxv. 8): "*Thou shalt drink it and suck it out*, not because it is pleasant, but because it is forced upon thee (v. 34); *thou shalt break the shreds thereof*, and *pluck off thy own breasts*, for indignation at the extreme bitterness of this cup, being *full of the fury of the Lord* (Isa. li. 20), as men in great anguish tear their hair, and throw every thing from them. Finding there is no remedy, but it must be drank (for *I have spoken it, saith the Lord God*), thou shalt have no manner of patience in the drinking of it." 3. They shall be intoxicated by it, made sick, and be at their wits' end, as men in drink are, staggering, and stumbling, and ready to fall (v. 33): "*Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow*. Note, Drunkenness has sorrow attending it, to such a degree that the utmost confusion and astonishment are here represented by it. Who would think that that which is such a force upon nature, such a scandal to it, which deprives men of their reason, disorders them to the last degree, and is therefore expressive of the greatest

misery, should yet be with many a beloved sin, that they should damn their own souls to distemper their own bodies? *Who has woe and sorrow like them?* Prov. xxiii. 29. 4. Being so intoxicated, they shall become, as drunkards deserve to be, a laughing-stock to all about them (v. 32): "*Thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision*, as acting ridiculously in every thing thou goest about. When God is about to ruin a people he makes *their judges fools* and *pours contempt on their princes*, Job xii. 17, 21.

IV. In all this God will be justified, and by all this they will be reformed; and so the issue even of this will be God's glory and their good. 1. They have been bad, very bad, and that justifies God in all that is brought upon them (v. 30): "*I will do these things unto thee because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen*, and (v. 35) *because thou hast forgotten me and cast me behind thy back*. Note, Forgetfulness of God, and a contempt of him, of his eye upon us and authority over us, are at the bottom of all our treacherous adulterous departures from him. Therefore men wander after idols, because they forget God, and their obligations to him; nor could they look with so much desire and delight upon the baits of sin if they did not first cast God *behind their back*, as not worthy to be regarded. And those who put such an affront upon God, how can they think but that it should turn upon themselves at last? Therefore bear thou also *thy lewdness and thy whoredoms*; that is, thou shalt suffer the punishment of them, and thou alone must bear the blame. Men need no more to sink them than the weight of their own sins; and those who will not part with their lewdness and their whoredoms must bear them. 2. They shall be better, much better, and this fire, though consuming to many, shall be refining to a remnant (v. 27): "*Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee*. The judgments which were brought upon them by their sins parted between them and their sins, and taught them at length to say, *What have we to do any more with idols?* Observe, (1.) How inveterate the disease was: *Thy whoredoms were brought from the land of Egypt*. Their disposition to idolatry was early and innate, their practice of it was ancient, and had gained a sort of prescription by long usage. (2.) How complete the cure was notwithstanding: "Though it has taken root, yet it shall be made to cease, so that thou shalt not so much as *lift up thy eyes* to the idols again, nor *remember Egypt* with pleasure any more." They shall avoid the occasions of this sin, for they shall not so much as look upon an idol, lest their hearts should unawares *walk after their eyes*. And they shall abandon all inclinations to it: "They shall not remember Egypt; they shall not retain any of that affection for idols which they had from the very infancy of their nation. They got it, through the corruption

of nature, in their bondage in Egypt, and lost it, through the grace of God, in their captivity in Babylon, which this was the blessed fruit of, even *the taking away of sin, of that sin*; so that whereas, before the captivity, no nation (all things considered) was more impetuously bent upon idols and idolatry than they were, after that captivity no nation was more vehemently set against idols and idolatry than they were, insomuch that at this day the image-worship which is practised in the church of Rome confirms the Jews as much as any thing in their prejudices against the Christian religion.

36 The LORD said moreover unto me; Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah? yea, declare unto them their abominations; 37 That they have committed adultery, and blood *is* in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through *the fire*, to devour *them*. 38 Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. 39 For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house. 40 And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger *was* sent; and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments, 41 And satest upon a stately bed, and a table prepared before it, whereupon thou hast set mine incense and mine oil. 42 And a voice of a multitude being at ease *was* with her: and with the men of the common sort *were* brought Sabeans from the wilderness, which put bracelets upon their hands, and beautiful crowns upon their heads. 43 Then said I unto *her that was* old in adulteries, Will they now commit whoredoms with her, and she *with them*? 44 Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women. 45 And the righteous men, they shall judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of

women that shed blood; because they *are* adulteresses, and blood *is* in their hands. 46 For thus saith the Lord God; I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled. 47 And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. 48 Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. 49 And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord God.

After the ten tribes were carried into captivity, and that kingdom was made quite desolate, the remains of it by degrees incorporated with the kingdom of Judah, and gained a settlement (many of them) in Jerusalem; so that the *two sisters* had in effect become *one* again; and therefore, in these verses, the prophet takes those to task jointly who were thus conjoined: "*Wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah together? v. 36. Wilt thou go about to frame an excuse for them? Thou seest the matter is so bad as not to bear an excuse.*" Or, rather, "*Thou shalt now be employed, in God's name, to judge them, ch. xx. 4. The matter is rather worse than better since the union.*"

I. Let them be made to see the sins they are guilty of: *Declare unto them* openly and boldly *their abominations*. 1. They have been guilty of gross idolatry, here called *adultery*. *With their idols they have committed adultery* (v. 37), have broken their marriage-covenant with God, have lusted after the gratifications of a carnal sensual mind in the worship of God. This is the first and worst of the abominations he is to charge them with. 2. They have committed the most barbarous murders, in sacrificing their children to Moloch, a sin so unnatural that they deserve to hear of it upon all occasions: *Blood is in their hands*, innocent blood, the blood of their own children, which they have *caused to pass through the fire* (v. 37), not that they might be dedicated to the idols, but that they might be devoured, a sign that they loved their idols better than that which was dearest to them in the world. 3. They have profaned the sacred things with which God had dignified and distinguished them: *This they have done unto me*, this indignity, this injury, v. 38. Every contempt put upon that which is holy reflects upon him who is the fountain of holiness, and from a relation to whom whatever is called holy has its denomination. God had set up his sanctuary among them, but they



defiled it, by making it a house of merchandise, a den of thieves; nay, and much worse; there they set up their idols and worshipped them, and there they shed the blood of God's prophets. God had revealed to them his holy sabbaths, but they profaned them, by doing all manner of servile work therein, or perhaps by sports and recreations on that day, not only practised, but allowed and encouraged by authority. They defiled the sanctuary on the same day that they profaned the sabbath. To defile the sanctuary was bad enough on any day, but to do it on the sabbath day was an aggravation. We commonly say, *The better day the better deed*; but here, the better day the worse deed. God takes notice of the circumstances of sin which add to the guilt. He shows (v. 39) what was their profanation both of the sanctuary and of the sabbath. *They slew their children*, and sacrificed them to their idols, to the great dishonour both of God and of human nature; and then came, on the same day, their hands imbrued with the blood of their children and their clothes stained with it, to attend in God's sanctuary, not to ask pardon for what they had done, but to present themselves before him, as other Israelites did, expecting acceptance with him, notwithstanding these villanies which they were guilty of; as if God either did not know their wickedness or did not hate it. Thus they profaned the sanctuary, as if that were a protection to the worst of malefactors; for thus they did in the midst of his house. Note, It is a profanation of God's solemn ordinances when those that are grossly and openly profane and vicious impudently and impenitently so intrude upon the services and privileges of them. *Give not that which is holy unto dogs. Friend, how camest thou in hither?* 4. They have courted foreign alliances, been proud of them, and reposed a confidence in them. This also is represented by the sin of adultery, for it was a departure from God, not only to whom alone they ought to pay their homage and not to idols, but in whom alone they ought to put their trust, and not in creatures. Israel was a peculiar people, must dwell alone and not be reckoned among the nations; and they profane their crown, and lay their honour in the dust, when they covet to be like them or in league with them. But this they have now done; they have entered into strict alliances with the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, the most renowned and potent kingdoms at that time; but they scorned alliances with the petty kingdoms and states that lay near them, which yet might have been of more real service to them. Note, Affecting an acquaintance and correspondence with great people has often been a snare to good people. Let us see how Jerusalem courts her high allies, thinking thereby to make herself considerable. (1.) She privately requested that a public embassy might be sent to her (v. 40): *You sent a messenger for men to come from*

far. It seems, then, that the neighbours had no desire to come into a confederacy with Jerusalem, but she thrust herself upon them, and sent under-hand to desire them to court her: and, lo, they came. The wisest and best may be drawn unavoidably into company and conversation with profane and wicked people: but it is no sign either of wisdom or goodness to covet an intimacy with such and to court it. (2.) Great preparation was made for the reception of these foreign ministers, for their public entry and public audience, which is compared to the pains that an adulteress takes to make herself look handsome. Jezebel-like, thou paintedst thy face and deckedst thyself with ornaments, v. 40. The king and princes made themselves new clothes, fitted up the rooms of state, beautified the furniture, and made it look fresh. Thou satest upon a stately bed (v. 41), a stately throne; a table was prepared, whereon thou has set my oil and my incense. This was either, [1.] A feast for the ambassadors, a noble treat, agreeable to the other preparations. There was incense to perfume the room and oil to anoint their heads. Or, [2.] An altar already furnished for the ambassadors' use in the worship of their idols, to let them know that the Israelites were not so strait-laced but that they could allow foreigners the free exercise of their religion among them, and furnish them with chapels, yea, and complimented them so far as to join with them in their devotions; though the law of their God was against it, yet they could easily dispense with themselves to oblige a friend. The oil and incense God calls his, not only because they were the gift of his providence, but because they should have been offered at his altar, which was an aggravation of their sin in serving idols and idolaters with them. See Hos. ii. 8. (3.) There was great joy at their coming, as if it were such a blessing as never happened to Jerusalem before (v. 42): *A voice of a multitude being at ease was with her*. The people were very easy, for they thought themselves very safe and happy now that they had such powerful allies; and therefore attended the ambassadors with loud huzzas and acclamations of joy. A great confluence of people there was to the court upon this occasion. The men of the common sort were there to grace the solemnity, and to increase the crowd; and with them were brought Sabeans from the wilderness. The margin reads it *drunkards from the wilderness*, that would drink healths to the prosperity of this grand alliance, and force them upon others, and be most noisy in shouting upon this occasion. Whoever they were, in honour of the ambassadors they put bracelets upon their hands and beautiful crowns upon their heads, which made the cavalcade appear very splendid. (4.) God by his prophets warned them against making these dangerous leagues with foreigners (v. 43): "Then said I unto her that

was old in adulteries, that from the first was fond of leagues with the heathen, of matching with their families (Judg. iii. 6), and afterwards of making alliances with their kingdoms, and, though often disappointed therein, would never be dissuaded from it (this was the adultery she was old in), I said, *Will they now commit whoredoms with her and she with them?* Surely experience and observation will by this time have convinced both them and her that an alliance between the nation of the Jews and a heathen nation can never be for the advantage of either." They are *iron and clay*, that will not mix, nor will God bless such an alliance, or smile upon it. But, it seems, her being old in these adulteries, instead of weaning her from them, as one would expect, does but make her the more impudent and insatiable in them; for, though she was thus admonished of the folly of it, *yet they went in unto her*, v. 44. A bargain was soon clapped up, and a league made, first with this, and then with the other, foreign state. Samaria did so, Jerusalem did so, like lewd women. They could not rest satisfied in the embraces of God's laws and care, and the assurances of protection he gave them; they could not think his covenant with them security enough. But they must by treaties and leagues, politic ones (they thought) and well-concerted, throw themselves into the arms of foreign princes, and put their interests under their protection. Note, Those hearts go a whoring from God that take a complacency in the pomp of the world and put a confidence in its wealth, and in an *arm of flesh*, Jer. xvii. 5.

II. Let them be made to foresee the judgments that are coming upon them for these sins (v. 45): *The righteous men, they shall judge them.* Some make the instruments of their destruction to be the righteous men that shall judge them. The Assyrians that destroyed Samaria, the Chaldeans that destroyed Jerusalem, those were comparatively righteous, had a sense of justice between man and man and justly resented the treachery of the Jewish nation; however, they executed God's judgments, which, we are sure, are all righteous. Others understand it of the prophets, whose office it was, in God's name, to judge them and pass sentence upon them. Or we may take it as an appeal to all righteous men, to all that have a sense of equity; they shall all judge concerning these cities, and agree in their verdict, that forasmuch as they have been notoriously guilty of adultery and murder, and the guilt is national, therefore they ought to suffer the pains and penalties which by law are inflicted upon women in their personal capacity that shed blood and are adulteresses. Righteous men will say, "Why should bloody filthy cities escape any better than bloody filthy persons? Judge, I pray thee," Isa. v. 3. This judgment being given by the righteous men, the righteous

God will award execution. See here, 1. What the execution will be. v. 46, 47. The same as before, v. 23, &c. God will *bring a company of enemies upon them*, who shall be made to serve his holy purposes even when they are serving their own sinful appetites and passions. These enemies shall easily prevail, for God will *give them into their hands to be removed and spoiled*; this company shall *stone them with stones* as malefactors, shall *single them out and dispatch them with their swords*; and, as was sometimes done in severe executions (witness that of Achan), they shall *slay their children and burn their houses*. 2. What will be the effects of it. (1.) Thus they shall suffer for their sins: *Their lewdness shall be recompensed upon them* (v. 49); and they shall *bear the sins of their idols*, v. 35, 49. Thus God will assert the honour of his broken law and injured government, and let the world know what a just and jealous God he is. (2.) Thus they shall be broken off from their sins: *I will cause lewdness to cease out of the land*, v. 27, 48. The destruction of God's city, like the death of God's saints, shall do that for them which ordinances and providences before could not do; it shall quite take away their sin, so that Jerusalem shall rise out of its ashes a new lump, as gold comes out of the furnace purified from its dross. (3.) Thus other cities and nations will have fair warning given them to keep themselves from idols. *That all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness.* This is the end of the punishment of malefactors, that they may be made examples to others, who will *see and fear*. *Smite the scorner and the simple will beware.* The judgments of God upon some are designed to teach others, and happy are those who receive instruction from them not to tread in the steps of sinners, lest they be taken in their snares; those who would be taught this must *know God is the Lord* (v. 49), that he is the governor of the world, a God that judges in the earth, and with whom there is *no respect of persons*.

## CHAP. XXIV.

Here are two sermons in this chapter, preached on a particular occasion, and they are both from Mount Sinai, the mount of terror, both from Mount Ebal, the mount of curses; both speak the approaching fate of Jerusalem. The occasion of them was the king of Babylon's laying siege to Jerusalem, and the design of them is to show that in the issue of that siege he should be not only master of the place, but destroyer of it. I. By the sign of flesh boiling in a pot over the fire are shown the miseries that Jerusalem should suffer during the siege, and justly, for her filthiness, ver. 1-14. II. By the sign of Ezekiel's not mourning for the death of his wife is shown that the calamities coming upon Jerusalem were too great to be lamented, so great that they should sink down under them into a silent despair, ver. 15-27.

**A**GAIN in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day: the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. 3 And utter a parable unto



the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Set on a pot, set *it* on, and also pour water into it: 4 Gather the pieces thereof into it, *even* every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill *it* with the choice bones. 5 Take the choice of the flock, and burn also the bones under it, *and* make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein. 6 Wherefore thus saith the Lord God; Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum *is* therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall upon it. 7 For her blood is in the midst of her: she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; 8 That it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood upon the top of a rock, that it should not be covered. 9 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Woe to the bloody city! I will even make the pile for fire great. 10 Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. 11 Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and *that* the filthiness of it may be molten in it, *that* the scum of it may be consumed. 12 She hath wearied *herself* with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her: her scum *shall be* in the fire. 13 In thy filthiness *is* lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. 14 I the Lord have spoken *it*: it shall come to pass, and I will do *it*; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God.

We have here,

I. The notice God gives to Ezekiel in Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's laying siege to Jerusalem, just at the time when he was doing it (v. 2): "*Son of man, take notice, the king of Babylon, who is now abroad with his army, thou knowest not where, set himself against Jerusalem this same day.*" It

was many miles, it was many days' journey, from Jerusalem to Babylon. Perhaps the last intelligence they had from the army was that the design was upon Rabbath of the children of Ammon and that the campaign was to be opened with the siege of that city. But God knew, and could tell the prophet, "*This day, at this time, Jerusalem is invested, and the Chaldean army has sat down before it.*" Note, As all times, so all places, even the most remote, are present with God and under his view. He tells the prophet, that the prophet might tell the people, that so when it proved to be punctually true, as they would find by the public intelligence in a little time, it might be a confirmation of the prophet's mission, and they might infer that, since he was right in his news, he was so in his predictions, for he owed both to the same correspondence he had with Heaven.

II. The notice which he orders him to take of it. He must enter it in his book, *memorandum*, that in the ninth year of Jehoiachin's captivity (for thence Ezekiel dated, *ch. i. 2*, which was also the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, for he began to reign when Jehoiachin was carried off), in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem; and the date here agrees exactly with the date in the history, 2 Kings xxv. 1. See how God reveals things to his servants the prophets, especially those things which serve to confirm their word, and so to confirm their own faith. Note, It is good to keep an exact account of the date of remarkable occurrences, which may sometimes contribute to the manifesting of God's glory so much the more in them, and the explaining and confirming of scripture prophecies. *Known unto God are all his works.*

III. The notice which he orders him to give to the people thereupon, the purport of which is that this siege of Jerusalem, now begun, will infallibly end in the ruin of it. This he must say to the rebellious house, to those of them that were in Babylon, to be by them communicated to those that were yet in their own land. A rebellious house will soon be a ruinous house.

1. He must show them this by a sign; for that stupid people needed to be taught as children are. The comparison made use of is that of a *boiling pot*. This agrees with Jeremiah's vision many years before, when he first began to be a prophet, and probably was designed to put them in mind of that (Jer. i. 13, *I see a seething pot, with the face towards the north*; and the explanation of it (v. 15) makes it to signify the besieging of Jerusalem by the northern nations); and, as this comparison is intended to confirm Jeremiah's vision, so also to confront the vain confidence of the princes of Jerusalem, who had said (*ch. xi. 3*), *This city is the caldron and we are the flesh*, meaning, "We are as safe here as if we were surrounded with walls

of brass." "Well," says God, "it shall be so; you shall be boiled in Jerusalem, as the *flesh in the caldron*, boiled to pieces; let the pot be set on with water in it (v. 4); let it be filled with the flesh of the *choice of the flock* (v. 5), with the choice pieces (v. 4), and the marrow-bones, and let the other bones serve for fuel, that, one way or other, either in the pot or under it, the whole beast may be made use of." A fire of bones, though it be a slow fire (for the siege was to be long), is yet a sure and lasting fire; such was God's wrath against them, and not like the *crackling of thorns under a pot*, which has noise and blaze, but no intense heat. Those that from all parts of the country fled into Jerusalem for safety would be sadly disappointed when the siege laid to it would soon make the place too hot for them; and yet there was no getting out of it, but they must be forced to abide by it, as the flesh in a boiling pot.

2. He must give them a comment upon this sign. It is to be construed as a *woe to the bloody city*, v. 6. And again (v. 9), being *bloody*, let it *go to pot*, to be boiled; that is the fittest place for it. Let us here see,

(1.) What is the course God takes with it.

Jerusalem, during the siege, is like a pot boiling over the fire, all in a heat, all in a hurry. [1.] Care is taken to keep a good fire under the pot, which signifies the closeness of the siege, and the many vigorous attacks made upon the city by the besiegers, and especially the continued wrath of God burning against them (v. 9): *I will make the pile for fire great*. Commission is given to the Chaldeans (v. 10) to *heap on wood, and kindle the fire*, to make Jerusalem more and more hot to the inhabitants. Note, The fire which God kindles for the consuming of impenitent sinners shall never abate, much less go out, for want of fuel. *Tophet has fire and much wood*, Isa. xxx. 33. [2.] The meat, as it is boiled, is taken out, and given to the Chaldeans for them to feast upon. "*Consume the flesh*; let it be thoroughly boiled, boiled to rags. *Spice it well*, and make it savoury, for those that will feed sweetly upon it. *Let the bones be burnt*," either the bones under the pot ("let them be consumed with the other fuel") or, as some think, the bones in the pot—"let it boil so furiously that not only the flesh may be sodden, but even the bones softened; let all the inhabitants of Jerusalem be by sickness, sword, and famine, reduced to the extremity of misery." And then (v. 6), "*Bring it out piece by piece*"; let every man be delivered into the enemy's hand, to be either put to the sword or made a prisoner. Let them be an easy prey to them, and let the Chaldeans fall upon them as eagerly as a hungry man does upon a good dish of meat when it is set before him. *Let no lot fall upon it*; every piece in the pot shall be fetched out and devoured, first or last, and therefore it is no

matter for casting lots which shall be fetched out first." It was a very severe military execution when David measured Moab with *two lines to put to death and one full line to keep alive*, 2 Sam. viii. 2. But here is no line, no lot of mercy, made use of; all goes one way, and that is to destruction. [3.] When all the broth is boiled away the pot is set empty upon the coals, that it may burn too, which signifies the setting of the city on fire, v. 11. The scum of the meat, or (as some translate it) *the rust of the metal*, has so got into the pot that there is no making it clean by washing or scouring it; and therefore it must be done by fire; so let the filthiness be burnt out of it, or, rather, *melting in it* and burnt with it. Let the vipers and their nest be consumed together.

(2.) What is the quarrel God has with it.

He would not take these severe methods with Jerusalem but that he is provoked to it; she deserves to be thus dealt with, for, [1.] It is a bloody city (v. 7, 8): *Her blood is in the midst of her*. Many a barbarous murder has been committed in the very heart of the city; nay, and they have a disposition to cruelty in their hearts; they inwardly delight in blood-shed, and so it is *in the midst of them*. Nay, they commit their murders in the face of the sun, and openly and impudently avow them, in defiance of the justice both of God and man. She did not *pour out* the blood she shed *upon the ground, to cover it with dust*, as being ashamed of the sin or afraid of the punishment. She did not look upon it as a filthy thing, proper to be concealed (Deut. xxiii. 13), much less dangerous. Nay, she poured out the innocent blood she shed upon a rock, where it would not soak in, upon *the top of a rock*, in despite of divine views and vengeance. They shed innocent blood under colour of justice; so that they gloried in it, as if they had done God and the country good service, so put it, as it were, *on the top of a rock*. Or it may refer to the sacrificing of their children on their high places, perhaps on the top of rocks. Now thus they *caused fury to come up, and take vengeance*, v. 8. It could not be avoided but that God *must in anger visit for these things; his soul must be avenged on such a nation as this*. If such impudent murderers as these, that even dare divine vengeance, go unpunished, it will be said that God has *forsaken the earth*. It is absolutely necessary that such a bloody city as this should have blood given her to drink, for she is worthy, for the vindicating of the honour of divine justice. And, the crime having been public and notorious, it is fit that the punishment should be so too: *I have set her blood on the top of a rock*. Jerusalem was to be made an example, and therefore was made a spectacle, to the world; God dealt with her according to the law of retaliation. It is fit that those who *sin before all* should be *rebuked before all*; and that the reputation of



those should not be consulted by the concealment of their punishment who were so impudent as not to desire the concealment of their sin. [2.] It is a filthy city. Great notice is taken, in this explanation of the comparison, of the *scum of this pot*, which signifies the sin of Jerusalem, working up and appearing when the judgments of God were upon her. It is the pot *whose scum is therein* and has not gone out of it, v. 6. 'The great scum that went not forth out of her (v. 12), that stuck to the pot when all was boiled away, and was molten in it (v. 11), some of this runs over into the fire (v. 12), inflames that, and makes it burn the more furiously, but it shall all be consumed at last, v. 11. When the hand of God had gone out against them, instead of humbling themselves under it, repenting and reforming, and accepting the punishment of their iniquity, they grew more impudent and outrageous in sin, quarrelled with God, persecuted his prophets, were fierce to one another, enraged to the last degree against the Chaldeans, snarled at the stone, gnawed their chain, and were like a wild bull in a net. This was *their scum*; in their distress they trespassed yet more against the Lord, like that king Ahaz, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. There is little hope of those who are made worse by that which should make them better, whose corruptions are excited and exasperated by those rebukes both of the word and of the providence of God which were designed for the suppressing and subduing of them, or of those whose scum boiled up once in convictions, and confessions of sin, as if it would be taken off by reformation, but afterwards returned again, in a revolt from their good overtures; and the heart that seemed softened is hardened again. This was Jerusalem's case: *She has wearied with lies*, wearied her God with purposes and promises of amendment, which she never stood to, wearied herself with her carnal confidences, which have all deceived her, v. 12. Note, Those that follow after lying vanities weary themselves with the pursuit. Now see her doom, v. 13, 14. Because she is incurably wicked she is abandoned to ruin, without remedy. First, Methods and means of reformation had been tried in vain (v. 13): "*In thy filthiness is lewdness*; thou hast become obstinate and impudent in it; thou hast got a habit of it, which is confirmed by frequent acts. *In thy filthiness* there is a rooted lewdness; as appears by this, *I have purged thee and thou wast not purged*. I have given thee medicine, but it has done thee no good. I have used the means of cleansing thee, but they have been ineffectual; the intention of them has not been answered." Note, It is sad to think how many there are on whom ordinances and providences are all lost. Secondly, It is therefore resolved that no more such methods shall be used: *Thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more*. The fire shall no longer be a refining

fire, but a consuming fire, and therefore shall not be mitigated and shortened, as it has been, but shall be continued in extremity, till it has done its destroying work. Note, Those that will not be healed are justly given up and their case adjudged desperate. There is a day coming when it will be said, *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still*. Thirdly, Nothing remains then but to bring them to utter ruin: *I will cause my fury to rest upon thee*. This is the same with what is said of the later Jews, that *wrath has come upon them to the uttermost*, 1 Thess. ii. 16. They deserve it: *According to thy doings they shall judge thee*, v. 14. And God will do it. The sentence is bound on with repeated ratifications, that they might be awakened to see how certain their ruin was: "*I the Lord have spoken it*, who am able to make good what I have spoken; *it shall come to pass*, nothing shall prevent it, for *I will do it myself, I will not go back* upon any entreaties; the decree has gone forth, and *I will not spare* in compassion to them, *neither will I repent*." He will neither change his mind nor his way. Hereby the prophet was forbidden to intercede for them, and they were forbidden to flatter themselves with hopes of an escape. God hath said it, and he will do it. Note, The declarations of God's wrath against sinners are as inviolable as the assurances he has given of favour to his people; and the case of such is sad indeed, who have brought it to this issue, that either God must be false or they must be damned.

15 Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 16 Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. 17 Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men. 18 So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded. 19 And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so? 20 Then I answered them, The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 21 Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall

by the sword. 22 And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover *your* lips, nor eat the bread of men. 23 And your tires *shall be* upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. 24 Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I *am* the Lord God. 25 Also, thou son of man, *shall it not be* in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters, 26 *That* he that escapeth in that day shall come unto thee, to cause *thee* to hear *it* with *thine* ears? 27 In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord.

These verses conclude what we have been upon all along from the beginning of this book, to wit, Ezekiel's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem; for after this, though he prophesied much concerning other nations; he said no more concerning Jerusalem, till he heard of the destruction of it, almost three years after, *ch.* xxxiii. 21. He had assured them, in the former part of this chapter, that there was no hope at all of the preventing of the trouble; here he assures them that they should not have the ease of weeping for it. Observe here,

1. The sign by which this was represented to them, and it was a sign that cost the prophet very dear; the more shame for them that when he, by a divine appointment, was at such an expense to affect them with what he had to deliver, yet they were not affected by it.

1. He must lose a good wife, that should suddenly be taken from him by death. God gave him notice of it before, that it might be the less surprise to him (*v.* 16): *Behold, I take away from thee the desire of thy eyes with a stroke.* Note, (1.) A married state may very well agree with the prophetic office; it is *honourable in all*, and therefore not sinful in ministers. (2.) Much of the comfort of human life lies in agreeable relations. No doubt Ezekiel found a prudent tender yoke-fellow, that shared with him in his griefs and cares, to be a happy companion in his captivity. (3.) Those in the conjugal relation must be to each other not only a *covering of*

*the eyes* (*Gen.* xx. 16), to restrain wandering looks after others; but a *desire of the eyes*, to engage pleasing looks on one another. A beloved wife is the *desire of the eyes*, which find not any object more grateful. (4.) That is least safe which is most dear; we know not how soon the desire of our eyes may be removed from us and may become the sorrow of our hearts, which is a good reason why those that *have wives* should be *as though they had none*, and those *who rejoice* in them *as though they rejoiced not*, 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30. Death is a stroke which the most pious, the most useful, the most amiable, are not exempted from. (5.) When the desire of our eyes is taken away with a stroke we must see and own the hand of God in it: *I take away the desire of thy eyes.* He takes our creature-comforts from us when and how he pleases; he gave them to us, but reserved to himself a property in them; and *may he not do what he will with his own?* (6.) Under afflictions of this kind it is good for us to remember that we are *sons of men*; for so God calls the prophet here. If thou art a *son of Adam*, thy wife is a daughter of *Eve*, and therefore a dying creature. It is an affliction which the children of men are liable to; and *shall the earth be forsaken for us?* According to this prediction, he tells us (*v.* 18), *I spoke unto the people in the morning*; for God sent his prophets, *rising up early* and sending them; then he thought, if ever, they would be disposed to hearken to him. Observe, [1.] Though God had given Ezekiel a certain prospect of this affliction coming upon him, yet it did not take him off from his work, but he resolved to go on in that. [2.] We may the more easily bear an affliction if it find us in the way of our duty; for nothing can hurt us, nothing come amiss to us, while we keep ourselves in the love of God.

2. He must deny himself the satisfaction of mourning for his wife, which would have been both an honour to her and an ease to the oppression of his own spirit. He must not use the natural expressions of sorrow, *v.* 16. He must not give vent to his passion by *weeping*, or letting *his tears run down*, though tears are a tribute due to the dead, and, when the body is sown, it is fit that it should thus be watered. But Ezekiel is not allowed to do this, though he thought he had as much reason to do it as any man and would perhaps be ill thought of by the people if he did it not. Much less might he use the customary formalities of mourners. He must dress himself in his usual attire, must bind his turban on him, here called *the tire of his head*, must *put on his shoes*, and not go barefoot, as was usual in such cases; he must not *cover his lips*, not throw a veil over his face (as mourners were wont to do, *Lev.* xiii. 45), must not be of a *sorrowful countenance*, *appearing unto men to fast*, *Matt.* vi. 18. He must not *eat the bread of men*, nor expect that his neighbours and friends should



send him in provisions, as usually they did in such cases, presuming the mourners had no heart to provide meat for themselves; but, if it were sent, he must not eat of it, but go on in his business as at other times. It could not but be greatly against the grain to flesh and blood not to lament the death of one he loved so dearly, but so God commands; and *I did in the morning as I was commanded*. He appeared in public, in his usual habit, and looked as he used to do, without any signs of mourning. (1.) Here there was something peculiar, and Ezekiel, to make himself a sign to the people, must put a force upon himself and exercise an extraordinary piece of self-denial. Note, Our dispositions must always submit to God's directions, and his command must be obeyed even in that which is most difficult and displeasing to us. (2.) Though mourning for the dead be a duty, yet it must always be kept under the government of religion and right reason, and we must not sorrow as those that have no hope, nor lament the loss of any creature, even the most valuable, and that which we could worst spare, as if we had lost our God, or as if all our happiness were gone with it; and, of this moderation in mourning, ministers, when it is their case, ought to be examples. We must at such a time study to improve the affliction, to accommodate ourselves to it, and to get our acquaintance with the other world increased, by the removal of our dear relations, and learn with holy Job to *bless the name of the Lord* even when he takes as well as when he gives.

II. The explication and application of this sign. The people enquired the meaning of it (v. 19): *Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us that thou doest so?* They knew that Ezekiel was an affectionate husband, that the death of his wife was a great affliction to him, and that he would not appear so unconcerned at it but for some good reason and for instruction to them; and perhaps they were in hopes that it had a favourable signification, and gave them an intimation that God would now comfort them again according to the time he had afflicted them, and make them look pleasant again. Note, When we are enquiring concerning the things of God our enquiry must be, "What are those things to us? What are we concerned in them? What conviction, what counsel, what comfort, do they speak to us? Wherein do they reach our case?" Ezekiel gives them an answer *verbatim*—word for word as he had received it from the Lord, who had told him what he must *speak to the house of Israel*.

1. Let them know that as Ezekiel's wife was taken from him by a stroke so would God take from them all that which was dearest to them, v. 21. If this was *done to the green tree, what shall be done to the dry?* If a faithful servant of God was thus afflicted

only for his trial, shall such a generation of rebels against God go unpunished? By this awakening providence God showed that he was in earnest in his threatenings, and inexorable. We may suppose that Ezekiel prayed that, if it were the will of God, his wife might be spared to him, but God would not hear him; and should he be heard then in his intercessions for this provoking people? No, it is determined: *God will take away the desire of your eyes*. Note, The removal of the comforts of others should awaken us to think of parting with ours too; for *are we better than they?* We know not how soon the same cup, or a more bitter one, may be put into our hands, and should therefore weep with those that weep, as being ourselves also in the body. God will *take away that which their soul pities*, that is, of which they say, What a pity is it that it should be cut off and destroyed! That *for which your souls are afraid* (so some read it); you shall lose that which you most dread the loss of. And what is that? (1.) That which was their public pride, the temple: "*I will profane my sanctuary*, by giving that into the enemy's hand, to be plundered and burnt." This was signified by the death of a wife, a dear wife, to teach us that God's sanctuary should be dearer to us, and more the *desire of our eyes*, than any creature-comfort whatsoever. Christ's church, that is his spouse, should be ours too. Though this people were very corrupt, and had themselves profaned the sanctuary, yet it is called *the desire of their eyes*. Note, Many that are destitute of the *power of godliness* are yet very fond of the *form* of it; and it is just with God to punish them for their hypocrisy by depriving them of that too. The sanctuary is here called *the excellency of their strength*; they had many strong-holds and places of defence, but the temple excelled them all. It was *the pride of their strength*; they prided in it as their strength that they were *the temple of the Lord*, Jer. vii. 4. Note, The church-privileges that men are proud of are profaned by their sins, and it is just with God to profane them by his judgments. And with these God will take away, (2.) That which was their family-pleasure, which they looked upon with delight: "*Your sons and your daughters* (which are the dearer to you because they are but a few left of many, the rest having perished by famine and pestilence) shall *fall by the sword* of the Chaldeans." What a dreadful spectacle would it be to see their own children, pieces, pictures, of themselves, whom they had taken such care and pains to bring up, and whom they loved as their own souls, sacrificed to the rage of the merciless conquerors! This, this, was the punishment of sin.

2. Let them know that as Ezekiel wept not for his affliction so neither should they weep for theirs. He must say, *You shall do as I have done*, v. 22. *You shall not mourn nor*

weep, v. 23. Jeremiah had told them the same, that men *shall not lament for the dead nor cut themselves* (Jer. xvi. 6); not that there shall be any such merciful circumstance without, or any such degrees of wisdom and grace within, as shall mitigate and moderate the sorrow; but they *shall not mourn*, for, (1.) Their grief shall be so great that they shall be quite overwhelmed with it; their passions shall stifle them, and they shall have no power to ease themselves by giving vent to it. (2.) Their calamities shall come so fast upon them, one upon the neck of another, that by long custom they shall be *hardened in their sorrows* (Job vi. 10) and perfectly stupified, and moped (as we say), with them. (3.) They shall not dare to express their grief, for fear of being deemed disaffected to the conquerors, who would take their lamentations as an affront and disturbance to their triumphs. (4.) They shall not have hearts, nor time, nor money, wherewith to put themselves in mourning, and accommodate themselves with the ceremonies of grief: "You will be so entirely taken up with solid substantial grief that you will have no room for the shadow of it." (5.) Particular mourners shall not need to distinguish themselves by *covering their lips*, and laying aside their ornaments, and *going barefoot*; for it is well known that every body is a mourner. (6.) There shall be none of that sense of their affliction and sorrow for it which would help to bring them to repentance, but that only which shall drive them to despair; so it follows: "*You shall pine away for your iniquities*, with seared consciences and reprobate minds, and *you shall mourn*, not to God in prayer and confession of sin, but *one towards another*," murmuring, and fretting, and complaining of God, thus making their burden heavier and their wound more grievous, as impatient people do under their afflictions by mingling their own passions with them.

III. An appeal to the event, for the confirmation of all this (v. 24): "*When this comes*, as it is foretold, when Jerusalem, which is this day besieged, is quite destroyed and laid waste, which now you cannot believe will ever be, *then you shall know that I am the Lord God*, who have given you this fair warning of it. Then you will remember that Ezekiel was to you a sign." Note, Those who regard not the threatenings of the word when they are preached will be made to remember them when they are executed. Observe,

1. The great desolation which the siege of Jerusalem should end in (v. 25): "*In that day*, that terrible day, when the city shall be broken up, *I will take from them*, (1.) That which they depended on—their *strength*, their walls, their treasures, their fortifications, their men of war; none shall stand them in stead. (2.) That which they boasted of—the *joy of their glory*, that which they looked

upon as most their glory, and which they most rejoiced in, the temple of their God and the palaces of their princes. (3.) That which they delighted in, which was the *desire of their eyes*, and on which they *set their minds*. Note, Carnal people set their minds upon that on which they can set their eyes; they look at, and dote upon, *the things that are seen*; and it is their folly to *set their minds* upon that which they have no assurance of and which may be taken from them in a moment, Prov. xxiii. 5. *Their sons and their daughters* were all this—their *strength, and joy, and glory*; and these shall go into captivity.

2. The notice that should be brought to the prophet, not by revelation, as the notice of the siege was brought to him (v. 2), but in an ordinary way (v. 26): "*He that escapes in that day shall*, by a special direction of Providence, *come to thee*, to bring thee intelligence of it," which we find was done, ch. xxxiii. 21. The ill-news came slowly, and yet to Ezekiel and his fellow-captives it came too soon.

3. The divine impression which he should be under upon receiving that notice, v. 27. Whereas, from this time to that, Ezekiel was thus far dumb that he prophesied no more against the land of Israel, but against the neighbouring nations, as we shall find in the following chapters, then he shall have orders given him to *speak again to the children of his people* (ch. xxxiii. 2, 22); then *his mouth shall be opened*. He was suspended from prophesying against them in the mean time, because, Jerusalem being besieged, his prophecies could not be sent into the city,—because, when God was speaking so loudly by the rod, there was the less need of speaking by the word,—and because then the accomplishment of his prophecies would be the full confirmation of his mission, and would the more effectually clear the way for him to begin again. It being referred to that issue, that issue must be waited for. Thus Christ forbade his disciples to preach openly that he was Christ till after his resurrection, because that was to be the full proof of it. "*But then thou shalt speak* with the greater assurance, and the more effectually, either to their conviction or to their confusion." Note, God's prophets are never silenced but for wise and holy ends. And when God gives them the opening of the mouth again (as he will in due time, for even the witnesses that are *slain shall arise*) it shall appear to have been for his glory that they were for a while silent, that people may the more certainly and fully *know that God is the Lord*.

## CHAP. XXV.

Judgment began at the house of God, and therefore with them the prophets began, who were the judges; but it must not end there, and therefore they must not. Ezekiel had finished his testimony which related to the destruction of Jerusalem. As to that he was ordered to say no more, but stand upon his watch-tower and wait the issue; and yet he must not be silent; there are divers nations bordering upon the land of Israel, which he must prophesy



against, as Isaiah and Jeremiah had done before; and must proclaim God's controversy with them, chiefly for the injuries and indignities which they had done to the people of God in the day of their calamity. In this chapter we have his prophecy, I. Against the Ammonites, ver. 1-7. II. Against the Moabites, ver. 8-11. III. Against the Edomites, ver. 11-14. IV. Against the Philistines, ver. 15-17. That which is laid to the charge of each of them is their barbarous and insolent conduct towards God's Israel, for which God threatens to put the same cup of trembling into their hand. God's resenting it thus would be an encouragement to Israel to believe that though he had dealt thus severely with them yet he had not cast them off, but would still own them and plead their cause.

**T**HE word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them; 3 And say unto the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God; Because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned; and against the land of Israel, when it was desolate; and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity; 4 Behold, therefore I will deliver thee to the men of the east for a possession, and they shall set their palaces in thee, and make their dwellings in thee: they shall eat thy fruit, and they shall drink thy milk. 5 And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the Ammonites a couchingplace for flocks: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 6 For thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast clapped *thine* hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart with all thy despite against the land of Israel; 7 Behold, therefore I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and will deliver thee for a spoil to the heathen; and I will cut thee off from the people, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries: I will destroy thee; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD.

Here, I. The prophet is ordered to address himself to the Ammonites, in the name of the Lord Jehovah the God of Israel, who is also the God of the whole earth. But what can Chemosh, the god of the children of Ammon, say, in answer to it? He is bidden to set his face against the Ammonites, for he is God's representative as a prophet, and thus he must signify that God set his face against them, for the face of the Lord is against those that do evil, Ps. xxxiv. 16. He must speak with boldness and assurance, as one that knew whose errand he went upon, and that he should be borne out in delivering it. He must therefore set his face as a flint, Isa. 1. 7. He must show his displeasure against

these proud enemies of Israel, and face them down, though they were very impudent, and thus must show that, though he had prophesied so much and so long against Israel, yet still he was for Israel, and, while he witnessed against their corruptions, he adhered to and gloried in God's covenant with them. Note, Those are miserable that have the preaching and praying of God's prophets against them, against whom their faces are set.

II. He is directed what to say to them. Ezekiel is now a captive in Babylon, and has been so many years, and knows little of the state of his own nation, much less of the nations that were about it; but God tells him both what they were doing and what he was about to do with them. And thus by the spirit of prophecy he is enabled to speak as pertinently to their case as if he had been among them.

1. He must upbraid the Ammonites with their insolent and barbarous triumphs over the people of Israel in their calamities, v. 3. The Ammonites said, when all went against the Jews, *Aha! so would we have it.* They were glad to see, (1.) The temple burned, the sanctuary profaned by the victorious Chaldeans. This is put first, to intimate what was the cause of the controversy; they had an enmity to the Jews for the sake of their religion, though it was only some poor remains of the profession of it that were to be found among them. (2.) The nation ruined. They rejoiced when the land of Israel was made desolate, the cities burnt, the country wasted, and both depopulated, and when the house of Judah went into captivity. When they had not power to oppress God's Israel themselves they were pleased to see the Chaldeans oppress them, partly because they envied their wealth and the good land they enjoyed, partly because they feared their growing power, and partly because they hated their religion and the divine oracles they were favoured with. It is repeated again (v. 6): *They clapped with their hands*, to irritate the rage of the Chaldeans, and to set them on as dogs upon the game; or they clapped their hands in triumph, attended this tragedy with their *Plaudite—Give us your applause*, thinking it well acted; never was there any thing more diverting or entertaining to them. *They stamped with their feet*, ready to leap and dance for joy upon this occasion; they not only rejoiced in heart, but they could not forbear showing it, though every one that had any sense of honour and humanity would cry shame upon them for it, especially considering that they rejoiced thus, not for any thing they got by Israel's fall (if so, they would have been the more excusable: most people are for themselves); but this was purely from a principle of malice and enmity: *Thou hast rejoiced in heart with all thy despite* (which signifies both scorn and hatred) *against the land of Israel.*

Note, The people of God have always had a great deal of ill-will borne them by this wicked world; and their calamities have been their neighbours' entertainments. See to what unnatural instances of malice the enmity that is in the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman will carry them. The Ammonites, of all people, should not have rejoiced in Jerusalem's ruin, but should rather have trembled, because they themselves had such a narrow escape at the same time; it was but "cross or pile" [the toss of a halfpenny] which should be besieged first, Rabbath or Jerusalem, *ch. xxi. 20*. And they had reason to think that the king of Babylon would set upon them next. But thus were their hearts hardened to their ruin, and their insolence against Jerusalem was to them an *evident token of perdition*, Phil. i. 28. It is a very wicked thing to be glad at the calamities of any, especially of God's people, and a sin that God will surely reckon for; such delight has God in showing mercy, and so backward is he to punish, that nothing is more pleasing to him than to be stopped in the ways of his judgments by intercessions, nor any thing more provoking than to *help forward the affliction* when he is but a *little displeased*, Zech. i. 15.

2. He must threaten the Ammonites with utter ruin for this insolence which they were guilty of. God turns away his wrath from Israel against them, as is said, Prov. xxiv. 17, 18. God is jealous for his people's honour, because his own is so nearly interested in it. And therefore those that touch that shall be made to know that they touch the apple of his eye. He had before predicted the destruction of the Ammonites, *ch. xxi. 28*. Had they repented, that would have been revoked; but now it is ratified. (1.) A destroying enemy is brought against them: *I will deliver thee to the men of the east*, first to the Chaldeans, who came from the north-east, and whose army, under the command of Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the country of the Ammonites, about five years after the destruction of Jerusalem (as Josephus relates, *Antiq. lib. x. cap. 11*), and then to the Arabians, who were properly the *children of the east*, who, when the Chaldeans had made the country desolate, and quitted it, came and took possession of it for themselves, probably with the consent of the conquerors. Shepherds' tents were their palaces; these they set up in the country of the Ammonites; there they *made their dwellings*, v. 4. They enjoyed the products of the country. *They shall eat thy fruit and drink thy milk*; and the milk from the cattle is the fruit of the ground at second-hand. They made use even of the royal city for their cattle (v. 5): *I will make Rabbath*, that was a nice and splendid city, to be a *stable for camels*; for its new masters, whose wealth lies all in cattle, will not think they can put the palaces of Rabbath to a better use. Rab-

bath had been a habitation of brutish men; justly therefore is it now made a *stable for camels* and the country a *couching-place for flocks*, more innocent beasts than those with which it had been before replenished. (2.) God himself acts as an enemy to them (v. 7): *I will stretch out my hand upon thee*, a hand that will reach far and strike home, which there is no resisting the blow of, for it is a mighty hand, nor bearing the weight of, for it is a heavy hand. God's hand stretched out against the Ammonites will not only deliver them *for a spoil to the heathen*, so that all their neighbours shall prey upon them, but will *cut them off from the people* and *make them perish out of the countries*, so that there shall be no remains of them in that place. Compare with this, Jer. xlix. 1, &c. What can sound more terrible than that resolution (v. 7), *I will destroy thee*? For the almighty God is able both to *save and to destroy*, and it is a *fearful thing to fall into his hands*. Both the threatenings here (v. 5 and v. 7) conclude with this, *You shall know that I am the Lord*. For, [1.] Thus God will maintain his own honour, and will make it appear that he is the God of Israel, though he suffers them for a time to be captives in Babylon. [2.] Thus he will bring those that were strangers to him into an acquaintance with him, and it will be a blessed effect of their calamities. Better know God and be poor than be rich and ignorant of him.

8 Thus saith the Lord God; Because that Moab and Seir do say, Behold, the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen; 9 Therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his cities *which are* on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim, 10 Unto the men of the east with the Ammonites, and will give them in possession, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations. 11 And I will execute judgments upon Moab; and they shall know that *I am the Lord*. 12 Thus saith the Lord God; Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword. 14 And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand



of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord God. 15 Thus saith the Lord God; Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred; 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will stretch out mine hand upon the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethims, and destroy the remnant of the sea coast. 17 And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.

Three more of Israel's ill-natured neighbours are here arraigned, convicted, and condemned to destruction, for contributing to and triumphing in Jerusalem's fall.

I. The Moabites. Seir, which was the seat of the Edomites, is joined with them (v. 8), because they said the same as the Moabites; but they were afterwards reckoned with by themselves, v. 12. Now observe,

1. What was the sin of the Moabites; they said, *Behold, the house of Judah is like unto all the heathen*. They triumphed, (1.) In the apostasies of Israel, were pleased to see them forsake their God and worship idols, and hoped that in a while their religion would be quite lost and forgotten and the house of Judah would be like all the heathen, perfect idolaters. When those that profess religion walk unworthy of their profession they encourage the enemies of religion to hope that it will in time sink, and be run down, and quite abandoned; but let the Moabites know that, though there are those of the house of Judah who have made themselves like the heathen, yet there is a remnant that retain their integrity, the religion of the house of Judah shall recover itself, its peculiarities shall be preserved, it shall not lose itself among the heathen, but distinguish itself from them, till it deliver itself honourably into a better institution. (2.) In the calamities of Israel. They said, "*The house of Judah is like all the heathen*", in as bad a state as they; their God is no more able to deliver them from this overflowing scourge of these parts of the world than the gods of the heathen are to deliver them. Where are the promises they gloried in and all the wonders which they and their fathers told us of? What the better are they for the covenant of peculiarity, upon which they so much valued themselves? Those that looked with so much scorn upon all the heathen are now set upon a level with them, or rather sunk below them." Note, Those who judge

only by outward appearance are ready to conclude that the people of God have lost all their privileges when they have lost their worldly prosperity, which does not follow, for good men, even in affliction, in captivity among the heathen, have graces and comforts within sufficient to distinguish them from all the heathen. Though the event seem one to the *righteous and wicked*, yet indeed it is vastly different.

2. What should be the punishment of Moab for this sin; because they triumphed in the overthrow of Judah, their country shall be in like manner overthrown with that of the Ammonites, who were guilty of the same sin (v. 9, 10): "*I will open the side of Moab*, will uncover its shoulder, will take away all its defences, that it may become an easy prey to any that will make a prey of it." (1.) See here how it shall be exposed; the frontier-towns, that were its strength and guard, shall be demolished by the Chaldean forces, and laid open. Some of the cities are here named, which are said to be the *glory of the country*, which they trusted in, and boasted of as impregnable; these shall decay, be deserted, or betrayed, or fall into the enemies' hands, so that Moab shall lie exposed, and whoever will may penetrate into the heart of the country. Note, Those who glory in any other defence and protection than that of the divine power, providence, and promise, will sooner or later see cause to be ashamed of their glorying. (2.) See here to whom it shall be exposed: *The men of the east*, when they come to take possession of the country of the Ammonites, shall seize that of the Moabites too. God, the Lord of all lands, will give them that land; for the kingdoms of men he gives to whomsoever he will. The Arabians, who are shepherds, and live quietly, plain men dwelling in tents, shall by an overruling Providence be put in possession of the land of the Moabites, who are soldiers, men of war, and cunning hunters, that live turbulently. The Chaldeans shall get it by war, and the Arabians shall enjoy it in peace. Concerning the Ammonites it is said, They shall no more be remembered among the nations (v. 10), for they had been accessory to the murder of Gedaliah, Jer. xl. 14. But of the Moabites it is said, *I will execute judgments upon Moab*; they shall feel the weight of God's displeasure, but perhaps not to that degree that the Ammonites shall; however, so far as that they shall know that *I am the Lord*, that the God of Israel is a God of power, and that his covenant with his people is not broken.

II. The Edomites, the posterity of Esau, between whom and Jacob there had been an old enmity. And here is,

1. The sin of the Edomites, v. 12. They not only triumphed in the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem, as the Moabites and Ammonites had done, but they took advantage from the present distressed state to which the Jews

were reduced to do them some real mischiefs, probably made inroads upon their frontiers and plundered their country: *Edom has dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance.* The Edomites had of old been tributaries to the Jews, according to the sentence that the elder should serve the younger. In Jehoram's time they revolted. Amaziah severely chastised them (2 Kings xiv. 7), and for this they *took vengeance.* Now they would pay off all the old scores, and not only incensed the Babylonians against Jerusalem, crying, *Rase it, rase it* (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), but cut off those that *escaped*, as we find in the prophecy of Obadiah, which is wholly directed against Edom, v. 11, 12, &c. It is called here *revenging a revenge*, which intimates that they were not only eager upon it, but very cruel in it, and recompensed to the Jews more than double. "Herein he has greatly offended." Note, It is a great offence to God for us to revenge ourselves upon our brother; for God has said, *Vengeance is mine.* We are forbidden to *revenge* or to *bear a grudge.* Suppose Judah had been hard upon Edom formerly, it was a base thing for the Edomites now, in revenge for it, to *smite them secretly.* But the Jews had a divine warrant to reign over the Edomites, for that therefore they ought not to have made reprisals; and it was the more disingenuous for them to retain the old enmity when God had particularly commanded his people to forget it. Deut. xxiii. 7, *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite.*

2. The judgments threatened against them for this sin. God will take them to task for it (v. 13): *I will stretch out my hand upon Edom.* Their country shall be desolate from *Teman*, which lay in the south part of it; and *they shall fall by the sword unto Dedan*, which lay north; the desolations of war should go through the nation. (1.) They had taken vengeance, and therefore God will lay his vengeance upon them (v. 14): *They shall know my vengeance.* Those that will not leave it to God to take vengeance for them may expect that he will take vengeance on them; and those that will not believe and fear his vengeance shall be made to know and feel his vengeance; they shall be dealt with *according to God's anger* and *according to his fury*, not according to the weakness of the instruments that are employed in it, but according to the strength of the arm that employs them. (2.) They had taken vengeance on Israel, and God will lay his vengeance on them *by the hand of his people Israel.* They suffered much by the Chaldeans, which seems to be referred to, Jer. xlix. 8. But besides that there were *saviours* to come upon Mount Zion, who should judge the mount of Esau (Obad. 21), and Israel's Redeemer comes *with dyed garments from Bozrah* (Isa. lxiii. 1), this implies a promise that Israel should recover itself again to such a degree as to be in a

capacity of curbing the insolence of its neighbours. And we find (1 Mac. v. 3) that *Judas Maccabeus fought against the children of Esau in Idumea, gave them a great overthrow, abated their courage, and took their spoil*; and Josephus says (*Antiq. lib. 13 cap. 17*), that Hircanus made the Edomites tributaries to Israel. Note, The equity of God's judgments is to be observed when he not only avenges injuries upon those that did them, but by those against whom they were done.

III. The Philistines. And, 1. Their sin is much the same with that of the Edomites: They have *dealt by revenge* with the people of Israel, and have *taken vengeance with a despiteful heart*, not to disturb them only, but to *destroy them, for the old hatred* (v. 15), the old grudge they bore them, or (as the margin reads it) *with perpetual hatred*, a hatred that began long since and which they resolved to continue. The anger was implacable: they *dealt by revenge*, traded in the acts of malice; it was their constant practice, and their heart, their spiteful heart was upon it. 2. Their punishment likewise is much the same, v. 16. Those that were for destroying God's people shall themselves be cut off and destroyed; and (v. 17) those that were for avenging themselves shall find that God will *execute great vengeance upon them.* This was fulfilled when that country was wasted by the Chaldean army, not long after the destruction of Jerusalem, which is foretold, Jer. xlvii. It was strange that these nations, which bordered upon the land of Israel, were not alarmed by the success of the Chaldean army, and made to tremble in the apprehension of their own danger; when their neighbour's house was on fire it was time to look to their own; but their impiety and malice made them forget their politics, till God by his judgments convinced them that the cup was going round, and they were the less safe for being secure.

## CHAP. XXVI.

The prophet had soon done with those four nations that he set his face against in the foregoing chapters; for they were not at that time very considerable in the world, nor would their fall make any great noise among the nations nor any figure in history. But the city of Tyre is next set to the bar; this, being a place of vast trade, was known all the world over; and therefore here are three whole chapters, this and the two that follow, spent in the prediction of the destruction of Tyre. We have "the burden of Tyre," Isa. xxiii. It is but just mentioned in Jeremiah, as sharing with the natives in the common calamity, ch. xxv. 22; xxvii. 3; xlvii. 4. But Ezekiel is ordered to be copious upon that head. In this chapter we have, I. The sin charged upon Tyre, which was triumphing in the destruction of Jerusalem, ver. 2. II. The destruction of Tyre itself foretold. 1. The extremity of this destruction: it shall be utterly ruined, ver. 4-6, 12-14. 2. The instruments of this destruction, many nations (ver. 3), and the king of Babylon by name with his vast victorious army, ver. 7-11. 3. The great surprise that this should give to the neighbouring nations, who would all wonder at the fall of so great a city and be alarmed at it, ver. 15-21.

AND it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, because that Tyrus hath said against



Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken *that was* the gates of the people: she is turned unto me: I shall be replenished, *now* she is laid waste: 3 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I *am* against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. 4 And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. 5 It shall be *a place* for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea: for I have spoken *it*, saith the Lord God: and it shall become a spoil to the nations. 6 And her daughters which *are* in the field shall be slain by the sword; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord. 7 For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. 8 He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. 9 And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. 10 By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter a city wherein is made a breach. 11 With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. 12 And they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise: and they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water. 13 And I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard. 14 And I will make thee like the top of

a rock: thou shalt be *a place* to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord have spoken *it*, saith the Lord God.

This prophecy is dated in the eleventh year, which was the year that Jerusalem was taken, and *in the first day of the month*, but it is not said what month, some think the month in which Jerusalem was taken, which was the fourth month, others the month after; or perhaps it was the first month, and so it was the first day of the year. Observe here,

I. The pleasure with which the Tyrians looked upon the ruins of Jerusalem. Ezekiel was a great way off, in Babylon, but God told him what Tyrus said against Jerusalem (v. 2): "*Aha! she is broken*, broken to pieces, that was the *gates of the people*, to whom there was a great resort and where there was a general rendezvous of all nations, some upon one account and some upon another, and I shall get by it; all the wealth, power, and interest, which Jerusalem had, it is hoped, shall be turned to Tyre, and so *now* that *she is laid waste I shall be replenished.*"

We do not find that the Tyrians had such a hatred and enmity to Jerusalem and the sanctuary as the Ammonites and Edomites had, or were so spiteful and mischievous to the Jews. They were men of business, and of large acquaintance and free conversation, and therefore were not so bigoted, and of such a persecuting spirit, as the narrow souls that lived retired and knew not the world. All their care was to get estates, and enlarge their trade, and they looked upon Jerusalem not as an enemy, but as a rival. Hiram, king of Tyre, was a good friend to David and Solomon, and we do not read of any quarrels the Jews had with the Tyrians; but Tyre promised herself that the fall of Jerusalem would be an advantage to her in respect of trade and commerce, that now she shall have Jerusalem's customers, and the great men from all parts that used to come to Jerusalem for the accomplishing of themselves, and to spend their estates there, will now come to Tyre and spend them there; and whereas many, since the Chaldean army became so formidable in those parts, had retired into Jerusalem, and brought their estates thither for safety, as the Rechabites did, now they will come to Tyre, which, being in a manner surrounded with the sea, will be thought a place of greater strength than Jerusalem, and thus the prosperity of Tyre will rise out of the ruins of Jerusalem. Note, To be secretly pleased with the death or decay of others, when we are likely to get by it, with their fall when we may thrive upon it, is a sin that does most easily beset us, but is not thought to be such a bad thing, and so provoking to God, as really it is. We are apt to say, when those who stand in our light, in our way, are removed, when they

break or fall into disgrace, "We shall be replenished now that they are laid waste." But this comes from a selfish covetous principle, and a desire to be placed alone in the midst of the earth, as if we grudged that any should live by us. This comes from a want of that love to our neighbour as to ourselves which the law of God so expressly requires, and from that inordinate love of the world as our happiness which the love of God so expressly forbids. And it is just with God to blast the designs and projects of those who thus contrive to raise themselves upon the ruins of others; and we see they are often disappointed.

II. The displeasure of God against them for it. The providence of God had done well for Tyrus. Tyrus was a pleasant and wealthy city, and might have continued so if she had, as she ought to have done, sympathized with Jerusalem in her calamities and sent her an address of condolence; but when, instead of that, she showed herself pleased with her neighbour's fall, and perhaps sent an address of congratulation to the conquerors, then God says, *Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus!* v. 3. And let her not expect to prosper long if God be against her.

1. God will bring formidable enemies upon her: *Many nations shall come against thee*, an army made up of many nations, or one nation that shall be as strong as many. Those that have God against them may expect all the creatures against them; for what peace can those have with whom God is at war? They shall come pouring in as *the waves of the sea*, one upon the neck of another, with an irresistible force. The person is named that shall bring this army upon them—*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings*, that had many kings tributaries to him and dependents on him, besides those that were his captives, Dan. ii. 37, 38. He is that *head of gold*. He shall come with a vast army, *horses and chariots, &c.*, all land-forces. We do not find that he had any naval force, or any thing wherewith he might attack it by sea, which made the attempt the more difficult, as we find *ch. xxix. 18*, where it is called a *great service which he served against Tyrus*. He shall besiege it in form (v. 8), *make a fort, and cast a mount*, and (v. 9) shall *set engines of war against the walls*. His troops shall be so numerous as to raise a dust that shall cover the city, v. 10. They shall make a noise that shall even *shake the walls*; and they shall shout at every attack, as soldiers do when they *enter a city that is broken up*; the horses shall prance with so much fury and violence that they shall even *tread down the streets* though so ever well paved.

2. They shall do terrible execution. (1.) The enemy shall make themselves masters of all their fortifications, shall *destroy the walls and break down the towers*, v. 4. For

what walls are so strongly built as to be a fence against the judgments of God? Her *strong garrisons shall go down to the ground*, v. 11. And the walls shall be broken down, v. 12. The city held out a long siege, but it was taken at last. (2.) A great deal of blood shall be shed: *Her daughters who are in the field*, the cities upon the continent, which were subject to Tyre as the mother-city, the inhabitants of them *shall be slain by the sword*, v. 6. The invaders begin with those that come first in their way. And (v. 11) *he shall slay thy people with the sword*; not only the soldiers that are found in arms, but the burghers, shall be *put to the sword*, the king of Babylon being highly incensed against them for holding out so long. (3.) The wealth of the city shall all become a spoil to the conqueror (v. 12): *They shall make a prey of the merchandise*. It was in hope of the plunder that the city was set upon with so much vigour. See the vanity of riches, that they are *kept for the owners to their hurt*; they entice and recompense thieves, and not only cease to benefit those who took pains for them and were duly entitled to them, but are made to serve their enemies, who are thereby put into a capacity of doing them so much the more mischief. (4.) The city itself shall be laid in ruins. All the *pleasant houses* shall be *destroyed* (v. 12), such as were pleasantly situated, beautified, and furnished, shall become a heap of rubbish. Let none please themselves too much in their pleasant houses, for they know not how soon they may see the desolation of them. Tyre shall be utterly ruined; the enemy shall not only pull down the houses, but shall carry away *the stones and the timber*, which might serve for the rebuilding of it, and shall *lay them in the midst of the water*, not to be recovered, or ever made use of again. Nay (v. 4), *I will scrape her dust from her*; not only shall the loose dust be blown away, but the very ground it stands upon shall be torn up by the enraged enemy, carried off, and laid *in the midst of the water*, v. 12. The *foundation is in the dust*; that dust shall be all taken away, and then the city must fall of course. When Jerusalem was destroyed it was *ploughed like a field*, Mic. iii. 12. But the destruction of Tyre is carried further than that; the very soil of it shall be scraped away, and it shall be made *like the top of a rock* (v. 4, 14), pure rock that has no earth to cover it; it shall only be a place *for the spreading of nets* (v. 5, 14); it shall serve fishermen to dry their nets upon and mend them. (5.) There shall be a full period to all its mirth and joy (v. 13): *I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease*. Tyre had been a joyous city (Isa. xxiii. 7); with her songs she had courted customers to deal with her in a way of trade. But now farewell all her profitable commerce and pleasant conversation; Tyre is no more a place either of business or of sport. *Lastly*, It shall be



built no more (v. 14), not built any more as it had been, with such state and magnificence, nor built any more in the same place, within the sea, nor built any where for a long time; the present inhabitants shall be destroyed or dispersed, so that this Tyre shall be no more. For God has spoken it (v. 5, 14); and when what he has said is accomplished they shall know thereby that he is the Lord, and not a man that he should lie nor the son of man that he should repent.

15 Thus saith the Lord God to Tyrus; Shall not the isles shake at the sound of thy fall, when the wounded cry, when the slaughter is made in the midst of thee? 16 Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and put off their brodered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit upon the ground, and shall tremble at every moment, and be astonished at thee. 17 And they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and say to thee, How art thou destroyed, that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, which cause their terror to be on all that haunt it! 18 Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure. 19 For thus saith the Lord God; When I shall make thee a desolate city, like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee, and great waters shall cover thee; 20 When I shall bring thee down with them that descend into the pit, with the people of old time, and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old, with them that go down to the pit, that thou be not inhabited; and I shall set glory in the land of the living; 21 I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God.

The utter ruin of Tyre is here represented in very strong and lively figures, which are exceedingly affecting.

1. See how high, how great, Tyre had been, how little likely ever to come to this. The remembrance of men's former grandeur

and plenty is a great aggravation of their present disgrace and poverty. Tyre was a renowned city (v. 17), famous among the nations, the crowning city (so she is called Isa. xxiii. 8), a city that had crowns in her gift, honoured all she smiled upon, crowned herself and all about her. She was inhabited of seas, that is, of those that trade at sea, of those who from all parts came thither by sea, bringing with them the abundance of the seas and the treasures hidden in the sand. She was strong in the sea, easy of access to her friends, but to her enemies inaccessible, fortified by a wall of water, which made her impregnable. So that she with her pomp, and her inhabitants with their pride, caused their terror to be on all that haunted that city, and upon any account frequented it. It was well fortified, and formidable in the eyes of all that acquainted themselves with it. Every body stood in awe of the Tyrians and was afraid of disobliging them. Note, Those who know their strength are too apt to cause terror, to pride themselves in frightening those they are an over-match for.

2. See how low, how little, Tyre is made, v. 19, 20. This renowned city is made a desolate city, is no more frequented as it has been; there is no more resort of merchants to it; it is like the cities not inhabited, which are no cities, and, having none to keep them in repair, will go to decay of themselves. Tyre shall be like a city overflowed by an inundation of waters, which cover it, and upon which the deep is brought up. As the waves had formerly been its defence, so now they shall be its destruction. She shall be brought down with those that descend into the pit, with the cities of the old world that were under water, and with Sodom and Gomorrah, that lie in the bottom of the Dead Sea. Or, she shall be in the condition of those who have been long buried, of the people of old time, who are old inhabitants of the silent grave, who are quite rotted away under ground and quite forgotten above ground; such shall Tyre be, free among the dead, set in the lower parts of the earth, humbled, mortified, reduced. It shall be like the places desolate of old, as well as like persons dead of old; it shall be like other cities that have formerly been in like manner deserted and destroyed. It shall not be inhabited again; none shall have the courage to attempt the rebuilding of it upon that spot, so that it shall be no more; the Tyrians shall be lost among the nations, so that people will look in vain for Tyre in Tyre: Thou shalt be sought for, and never found again. New persons may build a new city upon a new spot of ground hard by, which they may call Tyre, but Tyre, as it is, shall never be any more. Note, The strongest cities in this world, the best-fortified and best-furnished, are subject to decay, and may in a little time be brought to nothing. In the history of our own island many cities are spoken of as in being when

the Romans were here which now our antiquaries scarcely know where to look for, and of which there remains no more evidence than Roman urns and coins dug up there sometimes accidentally. But in the other world we look for a city that shall stand for ever and flourish in perfection through all the ages of eternity.

3. See what a distress the inhabitants of Tyre are in (v. 15): *There is a great slaughter made in the midst of thee*, many slain, and great men. It is probable that, when the city was taken, the generality of the inhabitants were put to the sword. Then did the *wounded cry*, and they cried in vain, to the pitiless conquerors; they cried *quarter*, but it would not be given them; the wounded are *slain* without mercy, or, rather, that is the only mercy that is shown them, that the second blow shall rid them out of their pain.

4. See what a consternation all the neighbours are in upon the fall of Tyre. This is elegantly expressed here, to show how astonishing it should be. (1.) *The islands shall shake at the sound of thy fall* (v. 15), as, when a great merchant breaks, all that he deals with are shocked by it, and begin to look about them; perhaps they had effects in his hands, which they are afraid they shall lose. Or, when they see one fail and become bankrupt of a sudden, in debt a great deal more than he is worth, it makes them afraid for themselves, lest they should do so too. Thus *the isles*, which thought themselves safe in the embraces of the sea, when they see Tyre fall, shall *tremble and be troubled*, saying, "What will become of us?" And it is well if they make this good use of it, to take warning by it not to be secure, but to stand in awe of God and his judgments. The sudden fall of a great tower shakes the ground round about it; thus all the islands in the Mediterranean Sea shall feel themselves sensibly touched by the destruction of Tyre, it being a place they had so much knowledge of, such interests in, and such a constant correspondence with. (2.) *The princes of the sea* shall be affected with it, who ruled in those islands. Or the rich merchants, who live like princes (Isa. xxiii. 8), and the masters of ships, who command like princes, these shall condole the fall of Tyre in a most compassionate and pathetic manner (v. 16): *They shall come down from their thrones*, as neglecting the business of their thrones and despising the pomp of them. *They shall lay away their robes of state, their brodered garments*, and shall *clothe themselves all over with tremblings*, with sackcloth that will make them shiver. Or they shall by their own act and deed make themselves to tremble upon this occasion; they shall *sit upon the ground* in shame and sorrow; they shall *tremble every moment* at the thought of what has happened to Tyre, and for fear of what may happen to themselves; for what island is safe if Tyre be not? They shall *take up a*

*lamentation for thee*, shall have elegies and mournful poems penned upon the fall of Tyre, v. 17. *How art thou destroyed!* [1.] It shall be a great surprise to them, and they shall be affected with wonder, that a place so well fortified by nature and art, so famed for politics and so full of money, which is the sinews of war, that held out so long and with so much bravery, should be taken at last (v. 21): *I make thee a terror*. Note, It is just with God to make those a terror to their neighbours, by the suddenness and strangeness of their punishment, who make themselves a terror to their neighbours by the abuse of their power. Tyre had *caused her terror* (v. 17) and now is made a terrible example. [2.] It shall be a great affliction to them, and they shall be affected with sorrow (v. 17); they shall *take up a lamentation for Tyre*, as thinking it a thousand pities that such a rich and splendid city should be thus laid in ruins. When Jerusalem, the holy city, was destroyed, there were no such lamentations for it; it was *nothing to those that passed by* (Lam. i. 12); but when Tyre, the trading city, fell, it was universally bemoaned. Note, Those who have the world in their hearts lament the loss of great men more than the loss of good men. [3.] It shall be a loud alarm to them: *They shall tremble in the day of thy fall*, because they shall have reason to think that their own turn will be next. If Tyre fall, who can stand? *Howl, fir-trees, if such a cedar be shaken*. Note, The fall of others should awaken us out of our security. The death or decay of others in the world is a check to us, when we dream that our mountain *stands strongly and shall not be moved*.

5. See how the irreparable ruin of Tyre is aggravated by the prospect of the restoration of Israel. Thus shall Tyre sink *when I shall set glory in the land of the living*, v. 20. Note, (1.) The holy land is the *land of the living*; for none but holy souls are properly living souls. Where living sacrifices are offered to the living God, and where the lively oracles are, there *the land of the living* is; there David hoped to *see the goodness of the Lord*, Ps. xxvii. 13. That was a type of heaven, which is indeed the *land of the living*. (2.) Though this land of the living may for a time lie under disgrace, yet God will again *set glory* in it; the glory that had departed shall return, and the restoration of what they had been deprived of shall be so much more their glory. God will himself be the glory of the lands that are the lands of the living. (3.) It will aggravate the misery of those that have their portion in the land of the dying, of those that are for ever dying, to behold the happiness of those, at the same time, that shall have their everlasting portion in the land of the living. When the rich man was himself in torment he saw Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, and glory set for him in the land of the living.



## CHAP. XXVII.

Still we are attending the funeral of Tyre and the lamentations made for the fall of that renowned city. In this chapter we have, I. A large account of the dignity, wealth, and splendour of Tyre, while it was in its strength, the vast trade it drove, and the interest it had among the nations (ver. 1—25), which is designed to make its ruin the more lamentable. II. A prediction of its fall and ruin, and the confusion and consternation which all its neighbours shall thereby be put into, ver. 25—35. And this is intended to stain the pride of all worldly glory, and, by setting the one over-against the other, to let us see the vanity and uncertainty of the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, and what little reason we have to place our happiness in them or to be confident of the continuance of them; so that all this is written for our learning.

**T**HE word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 2 Now, thou son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyrus; 3 And say unto Tyrus, O thou that art situate at the entry of the sea, *which art* a merchant of the people for many isles, Thus saith the Lord God; O Tyrus, thou hast said, *I am* of perfect beauty. 4 Thy borders *are* in the midst of the seas, thy builders have perfected thy beauty. 5 They have made all thy *ship* boards of fir trees of Senir: they have taken cedars from Lebanon to make masts for thee. 6 *Of* the oaks of Bashan have they made thine oars; the company of the Ashurites have made thy benches of ivory, *brought* out of the isles of Chittim. 7 Fine linen with brodered work from Egypt was that which thou spreadest forth to be thy sail; blue and purple from the isles of Elishah was that which covered thee. 8 The inhabitants of Zidon and Arvad were thy mariners: thy wise men, O Tyrus, *that* were in thee, were thy pilots. 9 The ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof were in thee thy calkers: all the ships of the sea with their mariners were in thee to occupy thy merchandise. 10 They of Persia and of Lud and of Phut were in thine army, thy men of war: they hanged the shield and helmet in thee; they set forth thy comeliness. 11 The men of Arvad with thine army *were* upon thy walls round about, and the Gammadims were in thy towers: they hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have made thy beauty perfect. 12 Tarshish *was* thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all *kind* of riches; with silver, iron, tin, and lead, they traded in thy fairs. 13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they *were* thy merchants: they traded the persons

of men and vessels of brass in thy market. 14 They of the house of Togarmah traded in thy fairs with horses and horsemen and mules. 15 The men of Dedan *were* thy merchants; many isles *were* the merchandise of thine hand: they brought thee for a present horns of ivory and ebony. 16 Syria *was* thy merchant by reason of the multitude of the wares of thy making: they occupied in thy fairs with emeralds, purple, and brodered work, and fine linen, and coral, and agate. 17 Judah, and the land of Israel, they *were* thy merchants: they traded in thy market wheat of Minneth, and Pannag, and honey, and oil, and balm. 18 Damascus *was* thy merchant in the multitude of the wares of thy making, for the multitude of all riches; in the wine of Helbon, and white wool. 19 Dan also and Javan going to and fro occupied in thy fairs: bright iron, cassia, and calamus, were in thy market. 20 Dedan *was* thy merchant in precious clothes for chariots. 21 Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, they occupied with thee in lambs, and rams, and goats: in these *were* *they* thy merchants. 22 The merchants of Shebah and Raamah, they *were* thy merchants: they occupied in thy fairs with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones, and gold. 23 Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Ashur, and Chilmad, *were* thy merchants. 24 These *were* thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes, and brodered work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords, and made of cedar, among thy merchandise. 25 The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market: and thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the midst of the seas.

Here, I. The prophet is ordered to take up a lamentation for Tyrus, v. 2. It was yet in the height of its prosperity, and there appeared not the least symptom of its decay; yet the prophet must lament it, because its prosperity is its snare, is the cause of its pride and security, which will make its fall the more grievous. Even those that live at ease are to be lamented if they be not preparing for trouble. He must lament it because its ruin is hastening on apace; it is sure, it is

near ; and though the prophet foretel it, and justify God in it, yet he must lament it. Note, We ought to mourn for the miseries of other nations, as well as for our own, out of an affection for mankind in general ; it is a part of the honour we owe to all men to bewail their calamities, even those which they have brought upon themselves by their own folly.

II. He is directed what to say, and to say it in the name of *the Lord Jehovah*, a name not unknown in Tyre, and which shall be better known, *ch. xxvi. 6.*

1. He must upbraid Tyre with her pride : *O Tyrus ! thou hast said, I am of perfect beauty (v. 3), of universal beauty (so the word is), every way accomplished, and therefore every where admired. Zion, that had the beauty of holiness, is called indeed the perfection of beauty (Ps. l. 2) ; that is the beauty of the Lord. But Tyre, because well-built and well-filled with money and trade, will set up for a perfect beauty. Note, It is the folly of the children of this world to value themselves on the pomp and pleasure they live in, to call themselves beauties for the sake of them, and, if in these they excel others, to think themselves perfect. But God takes notice of the vain conceits men have of themselves in their prosperity when the mind is lifted up with the condition, and often, for the humbling of the spirit, finds a way to bring down the estate. Let none reckon themselves beautified any further than they are sanctified, nor say that they are of perfect beauty till they come to heaven.*

2. He must upbraid Tyre with her prosperity, which was the matter of her pride. In elegies it is usual to insert encomiums of those whose fall we lament ; the prophet, accordingly, praises Tyre for all that she had that was praiseworthy. He has nothing to say of her religion, her piety, her charity, her being a refuge to the distressed or using her interest to do good offices among her neighbours ; but she lived great, and had a great trade, and all the trading part of mankind made court to her. The prophet must describe her height and magnificence, that God may be the more glorified in her fall, as the God who *looks upon every one that is proud and abases him, hides the proud in the dust together, and binds their faces in secret, Job xl. 12.*

(1.) The city of Tyre was advantageously situated, *at the entry of the sea (v. 3)*, having many commodious harbours each way, not as cities seated on rivers, which the shipping can come but one way to. It stood at the east end of the Mediterranean, very convenient for trade by land into all the Levant parts ; so that she became a *merchant of the people for many isles*. Lying between Greece and Asia, it became the great emporium, or mart-town, the rendezvous of merchants from all parts : *Thy borders are in the heart of the seas, v. 4.* It was surrounded with water, which was a great advantage to its trade ; it was the darling of the sea, laid in its bosom,

in its heart. Note, It is a great convenience, upon many accounts, to live in an island ; seas are the most *ancient land-mark*, not *which our fathers have set*, but the God of our fathers, and which cannot be removed as other land-marks may, nor so easily got over. The people so situated may the more easily *dwell alone*, if they please, as *not reckoned among the nations*, and yet, if they please, may the more easily traffic abroad and keep a correspondence with the nations. We therefore of this island must own that he who determines the bounds of men's habitations has determined well for us.

(2.) It was curiously built, according as the fashion then was ; and, being a city on a hill, it made a glorious show and tempted the ships that sailed by into her ports (*v. 4*) : *Thy builders have perfected thy beauty* ; they have so improved in architecture that nothing appears in the buildings of Tyre that can be found fault with ; and yet it wants that perfection of beauty into which the Lord does and will build up his Jerusalem.

(3.) It had its haven replenished with abundance of *gallant ships*, Isa. xxxiii. 21. The ship-carpenters did their part, as well as the house-carpenters theirs. The Tyrians are thought to be the first that invented the art of navigation ; at least they improved it, and brought it to as great a perfection perhaps as it could be without the loadstone. [1.] They made the *boards*, or planks, for the hulk of the ship, of *fir-trees* fetched from *Senir*, a mount in the land of Israel, joined with Hermon, Cant. iv. 8. Planks of fir were smooth and light, but not so lasting as our English oak. [2.] They had cedars from Lebanon, another mountain of Israel, for their masts, *v. 5.* [3.] They had oaks from Bashan (Isa. ii. 13), to make oars of ; for it is probable that their ships were mostly galleys, that go with oars. The people of Israel built few ships for themselves, but they furnished the Tyrians with timber for shipping. Thus one country uses what another produces, and so they are serviceable one to another, and cannot say to each other, *I have no need of thee.* [4.] Such magnificence did they affect in building their ships that they made the very *benches* of *ivory*, which they fetched from the *isles of Chittim*, from Italy or Greece, and had workmen from the Ashurites or Assyrians to make them, so rich would they have their state-rooms in their ships to be. [5.] So very prodigal were they that they made their *sails of fine linen* fetched from Egypt, and that *embroidered* too, *v. 7.* Or it may be meant of their *flags* (which they hoisted to notify what city they belonged to), which were very costly. The word signifies a *banner* as well as a *sail*. [6.] They hung those rooms on ship-board with *blue and purple*, the richest cloths and richest colours they could get from the isles they traded with. For though Tyre was itself famous for purple, which is therefore called the



Tyrian dye, yet they must have that which was far-fetched.

(4.) These gallant ships were well-manned, by men of great ingenuity and industry. The pilots and masters of the ships, that had command in their fleets, were of their own city, such as they could put a confidence in (v. 8): *Thy wise men, O Tyrus! that were in thee, were thy pilots.* But, for common sailors, they had men from other countries: *The inhabitants of Arvad and Zidon were thy mariners.* These came from cities near them; Zidon was sister to Tyre, not two leagues off, to the northward; there they bred able seamen, which it is the interest of the maritime powers to support and give all the countenance they can to. They sent to Gebal in Syria for *calkers, or strengtheners of the clefts or chinks*, to stop them when the ships come home, after long voyages, to be repaired. To do this they had the *ancients and wise men* (v. 9); for there is more need of wisdom and prudence to repair what has gone to decay than to build anew. In public matters there is occasion for the *ancients and wise men* to be the *repairers of the breaches and the restorers of paths to dwell in.* Nay, all the countries they traded with were at their service, and were willing to send men into their pay, to put their youths apprentice in Tyre, or to put them on board their fleets; so that *all the ships in the sea with their mariners were ready to occupy thy merchandise.* Those that give good wages shall have hands at command.

(5.) Their city was guarded by a military force that was very considerable, v. 10, 11. The Tyrians were themselves wholly given to trade; but it was necessary that they should have a good army on foot, and therefore they took those of other states into their pay, such as were fittest for service, though they had them from afar (which perhaps was their policy), from Persia, Lud, and Phut. These bore their arms when there was occasion, and in time of peace *hung up the shield and buckler* in the armoury, as it were to proclaim peace, and let the world know that they had at present no need of them, but they were ready to be taken down whenever there was occasion for them. Their *walls were guarded by the men of Arvad*; their *towers* were garrisoned by the *Gammadim*, robust men, that had a great deal of strength in their arms; yet the vulgar Latin renders it *pygmies*, men no longer than one's arm. They *hung their shields upon the walls* in their magazines or places of arms; or hung them out upon the walls of the city, that none might dare to approach them, seeing how well provided they were with all things necessary for their own defence. "Thus they set forth thy comeliness (v. 10), and made thy beauty perfect," v. 11. It contributed as much as any thing to the glory of Tyre that it had those of all the surrounding nations in its service, except the land of Israel (though it lay

next them), which furnished them with timber, but we do not find that it furnished them with men; that would have trenchoned upon the liberty and dignity of the Jewish nation, 2 Chron. ii. 17, 18. It was also the glory of Tyre that it had such a militia, so fit for service, and in constant pay, and such an armoury, like that in the tower of David, where hung the *shields of mighty men*, Cant. iv. 4. It is observable that there and here the armouries are said to be furnished with *shields and helmets*, defensive arms, not with swords and spears, offensive, though it is probable that there were such, to intimate that the military force of a people must be intended only for their own protection and not to invade and annoy their neighbours, to secure their own right, not to encroach upon the rights of others.

(6.) They had a vast trade and a correspondence with all parts of the known world. Some nations they dealt with in one commodity and some in another, according as either its products or its manufactures were, and the fruits of nature or art were, with which it was blessed. This is very much enlarged upon here, as that which was the principal glory of Tyre, and which supported all the rest. We do not find any where in scripture so many nations named together as are here; so that this chapter, some think, gives much light to the first account we have of the settlement of the nations after the flood, Gen. x. The critics have abundance of work here to find out the several places and nations spoken of. Concerning many of them their conjectures are different and they leave us in the dark and at much uncertainty; it is well that it is not material. Modern surveys come short of explaining the ancient geography. And therefore we will not amuse ourselves here with a particular enquiry either concerning the traders or the goods they traded in. We leave it to the critical expositors, and observe that only which is improvable. [1.] We have reason to think that Ezekiel knew little, of his own knowledge, concerning the trade of Tyre. He was a priest, carried away captive far enough from the neighbourhood of Tyre, we may suppose when he was young, and there he had been eleven years. And yet he speaks of the particular merchandises of Tyre as nicely as if he had been comptroller of the custom-house there, by which it appears that he was divinely inspired in what he spoke and wrote. It is God that *said this*, v. 3. [2.] This account of the trade of Tyre intimates to us that God's eye is upon men, and that he takes cognizance of what they do when they are employed in their worldly business, not only when they are at church, praying and hearing, but when they are in their markets and fairs, and upon the exchange, buying and selling, which is a good reason why we should in all our dealings *keep a conscience void of offence*, and have our eye always upon him whose eye is

always upon us. [3.] We may here observe the wisdom of God, and his goodness, as the common Father of mankind, in making one country to abound in one commodity and another in another, and all more or less serviceable either to the necessity or to the comfort or ornament of human life. *Non omnis fert omnia tellus—One land does not supply all the varieties of produce.* Providence dispenses its gifts variously, some to each, and all to none, that there may be a mutual commerce among those whom God has made of one blood, though they are made to dwell on all the face of the earth, Acts xvii. 26. Let every nation therefore thank God for the productions of its country; though they be not so rich as those of others, yet there is use for them in the public service of the world. [4.] See what a blessing trade and merchandise are to mankind, especially when followed in the fear of God, and with a regard not only to private advantage, but to a common benefit. *The earth is full of God's riches*, Ps. civ. 24. There is a multitude of all kinds of riches in it (as it is here, v. 12), gathered off its surface and dug out of its bowels. The earth is also full of the fruits of men's ingenuity and industry, according as their genius leads them. Now by exchange and barter these are made more extensively useful; thus what can be spared is helped off, and what is wanted is fetched in, in lieu of it, from the most distant countries. Those that are not tradesmen themselves have reason to thank God for tradesmen and merchants, by whom the productions of other countries are brought to our hands, as those of our own are by our husbandmen. [5.] Besides the necessities that are here traded in, see what abundance of things are here mentioned that only serve to please fancy, and are made valuable only by men's humour and custom; and yet God allows us to use them, and trade in them, and part with those things for them which we can spare that are of an intrinsic worth much beyond them. Here are *horns of ivory and ebony* (v. 15), that are brought for a present, exposed to sale, and offered in exchange, or (as some think) presented to the city, or the great men of it, to obtain their favour. Here are *emeralds, coral, and agate* (v. 16), all precious stones, and gold (v. 22), which the world could better be without than iron and common stones. Here are, to please the taste and smell, the *chief of all spices* (v. 22), *cassia and calamus* (v. 19), and, for ornament, *purple, brodered work, and fine linen* (v. 16), *precious clothes for chariots* (v. 20), *blue clothes* (which Tyre was famous for), *brodered work, and chests of rich apparel, bound with rich cords, and made of cedar*, a sweet wood to perfume the garments kept in them, v. 24. Upon the review of this invoice, or bill of parcels, we may justly say, What a great many things are here that we have no need of, and can live very comfortably with-

out! [6.] It is observable that Judah and the land of Israel were merchants in Tyre too; in a way of trade they were allowed to converse with the heathen. But they traded mostly in wheat, a substantial commodity, and necessary, *wheat of Minnith and Pannag*, two countries in Canaan famous for the best wheat, as some think. The whole land indeed was a land of wheat (Deut. viii. 8); it had the fat of kidneys of wheat, Deut. xxxii. 14. Tyre was maintained by corn fetched from the land of Israel. They traded likewise in honey, and oil, and balm, or rosin; all useful things, and not serving to pride or luxury. And the land which these were the staple commodities of was that which was the glory of all lands, which God reserved for his peculiar people, not those that traded in spices and precious stones; and the Israel of God must reckon themselves well provided for if they have food convenient; for those that are acquainted with the delights of the children of God will not set their hearts on the delights of the sons and daughters of men, or the treasures of kings and provinces. We find indeed that the New-Testament Babylon trades in such things as Tyre traded in, Rev. xviii. 12, 13. For, notwithstanding its pretensions to sanctity, it is a mere worldly interest. [7.] Though Tyre was a city of great merchandise, and they got abundance by buying and selling, importing commodities from one place and exporting them to another, yet manufacture-trades were not neglected. The wares of their own making, and a multitude of such wares, are here spoken of, v. 16, 18. It is the wisdom of a nation to encourage art and industry, and not to bear hard upon the handicraft-tradesmen; for it contributes much to the wealth and honour of a nation to send abroad wares of their own making, which may bring them in the multitude of all riches. [8.] All this made Tyrus very great and very proud: *The ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market* (v. 25); thou wast admired and cried up by all the nations that had dealings with thee; for thou wast replenished in wealth and number of people, wast beautified, and made very glorious, in the midst of the seas. Those that grow very rich are cried up as very glorious; for riches are glorious things in the eyes of carnal people, Gen. xxxi. 1.

26 Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters: the east wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas. 27 Thy riches, and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy calkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war, that are in thee, and in all thy company which is in the midst of thee, shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin. 28 The suburbs



shall shake at the sound of the cry of thy pilots. 29 And all that handle the oar, the mariners, *and* all the pilots of the sea, shall come down from their ships, they shall stand upon the land; 30 And shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes: 31 And they shall make themselves utterly bald for thee, and gird them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for thee with bitterness of heart *and* bitter wailing. 32 And in their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for thee, and lament over thee, *saying*, What *city* is like Tyrus, like the destroyed in the midst of the sea? 33 When thy wares went forth out of the seas, thou filledst many people; thou didst enrich the kings of the earth with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise. 34 In the time *when* thou shalt be broken by the seas in the depths of the waters thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall. 35 All the inhabitants of the isles shall be astonished at thee, and their kings shall be sore afraid, they shall be troubled in *their* countenance. 36 The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never *shall* be any more.

We have seen Tyre flourishing; here we have Tyre falling, and great is the fall of it, so much the greater for its having made such a figure in the world. Note, The most mighty and magnificent kingdoms and states, sooner or later, have their day to come down. They have their period; and, when they are in their zenith, they will begin to decline. But the destruction of Tyre was sudden. *Her sun went down at noon.* And all her wealth and grandeur, pomp and power, did but aggravate her ruin, and make it the more grievous to herself and astonishing to all about her. Now observe here, 1. How the ruin of Tyrus will be brought about, *v. 26.* She is as a great ship richly laden, that is split or sunk by the indiscretion of her steersmen: *Thy rowers have themselves brought thee into great and dangerous waters;* the governors of the city, and those that had the management of their public affairs, by some mismanagement or other involved them in that war with the Chaldeans which was the ruin of their state. By their insolence, by

some affront given to the Chaldeans or some attempt made upon them, in confidence of their own ability to contend with them, they provoked Nebuchadnezzar to make a descent upon them, and, by their obstinacy in standing it out to the last, enraged him to such a degree that he determined on the ruin of their state, and, *like an east wind, broke them in the midst of the seas.* Note, It is ill with a people when those that sit at the stern, instead of putting them into the harbour, run them aground. 2. How great and general the ruin will be. All her wealth shall be buried with her, *her riches, her fairs, and her merchandise* (*v. 27*); all that had any dependence upon her, and dealings with her, in trade, in war, in conversation, shall *fall with her into the midst of the seas, in the day of her ruin.* Note, Those who make creatures their confidence, place their happiness in their interest in them and rest their hopes upon them, will of course fall with them; *happy therefore are those that have the God of Jacob for their help, and whose hope is in the Lord their God, who lives for ever.* 3. What sad lamentation would be made for the destruction of Tyre. The pilots, her princes and governors, when they see how wretchedly they have mismanaged and how much they have contributed to their own ruin, shall *cry out* so loud as to make even the *suburbs shake* (*v. 28*), such a vexation shall it be to them to reflect upon their own bad conduct. The inferior officers, that were as the mariners of the state, shall be forced to come down from their respective posts (*v. 29*), and they shall *cry out against thee*, as having deceived them, in not proving so well able to hold out as they thought thou hadst been; they shall *cry bitterly* for the common ruin, and their own share in it. They shall use all the most solemn expressions of grief; they shall *cast dust on their heads*, in indignation against themselves, shall *wallow themselves in ashes*, as having bid a final farewell to all ease and pleasure; they shall *make themselves bald* (*v. 31*), with *tearing their hair*; and, according to the custom of great mourners, those shall *gird themselves with sackcloth* who used to wear fine linen, and, instead of merry songs, they shall *weep with bitterness of heart.* Note, Losses and crosses are very grievous, and hard to be borne, to those that have long been wallowing in pleasure and sleeping in carnal security. 4. How Tyre should be upbraided with her former honour and prosperity (*v. 32, 33*); she that was Tyrus the *renowned* shall now be called *Tyrus the destroyed in the midst of the sea.* "What city is like Tyre?" Did ever any city come down from such a height of prosperity to such a depth of adversity? Time was when *thy wares*, those of thy own making and those that passed through thy hands, *went forth out of the seas*, and were exported to all parts of the world; then *thou filledst many people, and didst enrich the kings of the earth* and

their kingdoms." The Tyrians, though they bore such a sway in trade, were yet, it seems, fair merchants, and let their neighbours not only live, but thrive by them. All that dealt with them were gainers; they did not cheat or oppress the people, but did enrich them with the multitude of their merchandise. "But now those that used to be enriched by thee shall be ruined with thee (as is usual in trade); *"when thou shalt be broken, and all thou hast is seized on, all thy company shall fall too,"* v. 34. There is an end of Tyre, that made such a noise and bustle in the world. This great blaze goes out in a snuff. 5. How the fall of Tyre should be matter of terror to some and laughter to others, according as they were differently interested and affected. Some shall be *sorely afraid*, and shall *be troubled* (v. 35), concluding it will be their own turn to fall next. Others shall *hiss at her* (v. 36), shall ridicule her pride, and vanity, and bad management, and think her ruin just. She triumphed in Jerusalem's fall, and there are those that will triumph in hers. When God casts his judgments on the sinner men also *shall clap their hands at him and shall hiss him out of his place*, Job xxvii. 22, 23. *Is this the city which men called the perfection of beauty?*

## CHAP. XXVIII.

In this chapter we have, I. A prediction of the fall and ruin of the king of Tyre, who, in the destruction of that city, is particularly set up as a mark for God's arrows, ver. 1—10. II. A lamentation for the king of Tyre, when he has thus fallen, though he falls by his own iniquity, ver. 11—19. III. A prophecy of the destruction of Tydon, which was in the neighbourhood of Tyre and had a dependence upon it, ver. 20—23. IV. A promise of the restoration of the Israel of God, though in the day of their calamity they were insulted over by their neighbours, ver. 24—25.

**T**HE word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart *is* lifted up, and thou hast said, *I am a God*, I sit *in* the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou *art* a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God: 3 Behold, thou *art* wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee: 4 With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: 5 By thy great wisdom *and* by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: 6 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; 7 Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom,

and they shall defile thy brightness. 8 They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of *them that are* slain in the midst of the seas. 9 Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, *I am God?* but thou *shalt be* a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. 10 Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken *it*, saith the Lord God.

We had done with Tyrus in the foregoing chapter, but now the prince of Tyrus is to be singled out from the rest. Here is something to be said to him by himself, a *message to him from God*, which the prophet must send him, whether he will hear or whether he will forbear.

I. He must tell him of his pride. His people are proud (*ch. xxvii. 3*) and so is he; and they shall both be made to know that *God resists the proud*. Let us see, 1. What were the expressions of his pride: *His heart was lifted up*, v. 2. He had a great conceit of himself, was puffed up with an opinion of his own sufficiency, and looked with disdain upon all about him. Out of the abundance of the pride of his heart he said, *I am a god*; he did not only say it in his heart, but had the impudence to speak it out. God has said of princes, *They are gods* (Ps. lxxxii. 6); but it does not become them to say so of themselves; it is a high affront to him who is *God alone*, and will not give his glory to another. He thought that the city of Tyre had as necessary a dependence upon him as the world has upon the God that made it, and that he was himself independent as God and unaccountable to any. He thought himself to have as much wisdom and strength as God himself, and as incontestable an authority, and that his prerogatives were as absolute and his word as much a law as the word of God. He challenged divine honours, and expected to be praised and admired as a god, and doubted not to be deified, among other heroes, after his death as a great benefactor to the world. Thus the king of Babylon said, *I will be like the Most High* (Isa. xiv. 14), not like the *Most Holy*. "*I am the strong God*, and therefore will not be contradicted, because I cannot be controlled. *I sit in the seat of God*; I sit *as high* as God, my throne equal with his. *Divisum imperium cum Jove Cæsar habet—Cæsar divides dominion with Jove*. I sit as safely as God; as safely *in the heart of the seas*, and as far out of the reach of danger, as he in the *height of heaven*." He thinks his guards of men of war about his throne as pompous and potent as the hosts of angels that are about the throne of God. He is put in mind of his meanness and mortality, and, since he needs to be told, he shall



be told, that self-evident truth, *Thou art a man, and not God*, a depending creature, a dying creature; thou art *flesh, and not spirit*, Isa. xxxi. 3. Note, Men must be made to know that they are *but men*, Ps. ix. 20. The greatest wits, the greatest potentates, the greatest saints, are *men, and not gods*. Jesus Christ was both God and man. The king of Tyre, though he has such a mighty influence upon all about him, and with the help of his riches bears a mighty sway, though he has tribute and presents brought to his court with as much devotion as if they were sacrifices to his altar, though he is flattered by his courtiers and made a god of by his poets, yet, after all, he is *but a man*; he knows it; he fears it. But he sets his heart as the heart of God: "Thou hast conceived thyself to be a god, hast compared thyself with God, thinking thyself as wise and strong, and as fit to govern the world, as he." It was the ruin of our first parents, and ours in them, that they would be *as gods*, Gen. iii. 5. And still that corrupt nature which inclines men to set up themselves as their own masters, to do what they will, and their own carvers, to have what they will, their own end, to live to themselves, and their own felicity, to enjoy themselves, sets their hearts as the heart of God, invades his prerogatives, and catches at the flowers of his crown—a presumption that cannot go unpunished.

2. We are here told what it was that he was proud of. (1.) His wisdom. It is probable that this prince of Tyre was a man of very good natural parts, a philosopher, and well read in all the parts of learning that were then in vogue, at least a politician, and one that had great dexterity in managing the affairs of state. And then he thought himself *wiser than Daniel*, v. 3. We found, before, that Daniel, though now but a young man, was celebrated for his preva- lency in prayer, ch. xiv. 14. Here we find he was famous for his prudence in the management of the affairs of this world, a great scholar and statesman, and withal a great saint, and yet not a prince, but a poor captive. It was strange that under such external disadvantages his lustre should shine forth, so that he had become *wise to a proverb*. When the king of Tyre dreams himself to be a god he says, *I am wiser than Daniel*. *There is no secret that they can hide from thee*. Probably he challenged all about him to *prove him with questions*, as Solomon was proved, and he had unriddled all their enigmas, had solved all their problems, and none of them all could puzzle him. He had perhaps been successful in discovering plots, and diving into the counsels of the neighbouring princes, and therefore thought himself omniscient, and that no thought could be withholden from him; therefore he said, *I am a god*. Note, *Knowledge puffeth up*; it is hard to know much and not to know it too well and

to be elevated with it. He that was *wiser than Daniel* was prouder than Lucifer. Those therefore that are knowing must study to be humble and to evidence that they are so. (2.) His wealth. That way his wisdom led him; it is not said that by his wisdom he searched into the arcana either of nature or government, modelled the state better than it was, or made better laws, or advanced the interests of the commonwealth of learning; but his *wisdom and understanding* were of use to him in *traffic*. As some of the kings of Judah loved husbandry (2 Chron. xxvi. 10), so the king of Tyre loved merchandise, and by it he *got riches, increased his riches, and filled his treasures with gold and silver*, v. 4, 5. See what the wisdom of this world is; those are cried up as the wisest men that know how to get money and by right or wrong to raise estates; and yet really *this their way is their folly*, Ps. xlix. 13. It was the folly of the king of Tyre, [1.] That he attributed the increase of his wealth to himself and not to the providence of God, forgetting him who gave him power to get wealth, Deut. viii. 17, 18. [2.] That he thought himself a wise man because he was a rich man; whereas a fool may have an estate (Eccl. ii. 19), yea, and a fool may get an estate, for the world has been often observed to favour such, *when bread is not to the wise*, Eccl. ix. 11. [3.] That his heart was lifted up because of his riches, because of the increase of his wealth, which made him so haughty and secure, so insolent and imperious, and which set his heart as the heart of God. The man of sin, when he had a great deal of worldly pomp and power, showed himself as a god, 2 Thess. ii. 4. Those who are rich in this world have therefore need to charge that upon themselves which the word of God charges upon them, *that they be not high-minded*, 1 Tim. vi. 17.

II. Since *pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*, he must tell him of that destruction, of that fall, which was now hastening on as the just punishment of his presumption in setting up himself a rival with God. "Because thou hast pretended to be a god (v. 6), therefore thou shalt not be long a man," v. 7. Observe here,

1. The instruments of his destruction: *I will bring strangers upon thee*—the Chaldeans, whom we do not find mentioned among the many nations and countries that traded with Tyre, ch. xxvii. If any of those nations had been brought against it, they would have had some compassion upon it, for old acquaintance-sake; but these strangers will have none. They are people of a *strange language*, which the king of Tyre himself, wise as he is, perhaps understands not. They are the *terrible of the nations*; it was an army made up of many nations, and it was at this time the most formidable both for strength and fury. These God has at command, and these he will bring upon the king of Tyre.

2. The extremity of the destruction: *They shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom* (v. 7), against all those things which thou gloriest in as thy beauty and the production of thy wisdom. Note, It is just with God that our enemies should make that their prey which we have made our pride. The king of Tyre's palace, his treasury, his city, his navy, his army, these he glories in as his brightness, these, he thinks, make him illustrious and glorious as a god on earth. But all these the victorious enemy shall defile, shall deface, shall deform. He thought them sacred, things that none durst touch; but the conquerors shall seize them as common things, and spoil the brightness of them. But, whatever becomes of what he has, surely his person is sacred. No (v. 8): *They shall bring thee down to the pit*, to the grave; thou shalt die the death. And, (1.) It shall not be an honourable death, but an ignominious one. He shall be so vilified in his death that he may despair of being deified after his death. He shall die the deaths of those that are slain in the midst of the seas, that have no honour done them at their death, but their dead bodies are immediately thrown overboard, without any ceremony or mark of distinction, to be a feast for the fish. Tyre is likely to be destroyed in the midst of the sea (ch. xxvii. 32) and the prince of Tyre shall fare no better than the people. (2.) It shall not be a happy death, but a miserable one. He shall die the deaths of the uncircumcised (v. 10), of those that are strangers to God and not in covenant with him, and therefore die under his wrath and curse. It is deaths, a double death, temporal and eternal, the death both of body and soul. He shall die the second death; that is dying miserably indeed. The sentence of death here passed upon the king of Tyre is ratified by a divine authority: *I have spoken it, saith the Lord God*. And what he has said he will do. None can gainsay it, nor will he unsay it.

3. The effectual disproof that this will be of all his pretensions to deity (v. 9): "When the conqueror sets his sword to thy breast, and thou seest no way of escape, wilt thou then say, *I am God*? Wilt thou then have such a conceit of thyself and such a confidence in thyself as thou now hast? No; thy being overpowered by death, and by the fear of it, will force thee to own that thou art not a god, but a weak, timorous, trembling, dying man. In the hand of him that slays thee (in the hand of God, and of the instruments that he employed) thou shalt be a man, and not God, utterly unable to resist, and help thyself." *I have said, You are gods; but you shall die like men*, Ps. lxxxii. 6, 7. Note, Those who pretend to be rivals with God shall be forced one way or other to let fall their claims. Death at furthest, when we come into his hand, will make us know that we are men.

11 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. 13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. 14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. 16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. 17 Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. 18 Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in sight of all them that behold thee. 19 All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.

As after the prediction of the ruin of Tyre (ch. xxvi) followed a pathetic lamentation for it (ch. xxvii), so after the ruin of the king of Tyre is foretold it is bewailed.

I. This is commonly understood of the prince who then reigned over Tyre, spoken to, v. 2. His name was *Ethbaal*, or *Ithobalus*, as Diodorus Siculus calls him that was king of Tyre when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed



it. He was, it seems, upon all external accounts an accomplished man, very great and famous; but his iniquity was his ruin. Many expositors have suggested that besides the literal sense of this lamentation there is an allegory in it, and that it is an allusion to the fall of the angels that sinned, who undid themselves by their pride. And (as is usual in texts that have a mystical meaning) some passages here refer primarily to the king of Tyre, as that of his merchandises, others to the angels, as that of being *in the holy mountain of God*. But, if there be anything mystical in it (as perhaps there may), I shall rather refer it to the fall of Adam, which seems to be glanced at, v. 13. *Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God, and that in the day thou wast created.*

II. Some think that by the king of Tyre is meant the whole royal family, this including also the foregoing kings, and looking as far back as Hiram, king of Tyre. The then governor is called *prince* (v. 2); but he that is here lamented is called *king*. The court of Tyre with its kings had for many ages been famous; but sin ruins it. Now we may observe two things here:—

1. What was the renown of the king of Tyre. He is here spoken of as having lived in great splendour, v. 12—15. He was a man, but it is here owned that he was a very considerable man and one that made a mighty figure in his day. (1.) He far exceeded other men. Hiram and other kings of Tyre had done so in their time; and the reigning king perhaps had not come short of any of them: *Thou sealest up the sun, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty*. Both the powers of human nature and the prosperity of human life seemed in him to be at the highest pitch. He was looked upon to be as wise as the reason of men could make him, and as happy as the wealth of this world and the enjoyment of it could make him; in him you might see the utmost that both could do; and therefore *seal up the sum*, for nothing can be added; he is a complete man, perfect *in suo genere—in his kind*. (2.) He seemed to be as wise and happy as Adam in innocence (v. 13): *“Thou hast been in Eden, even in the garden of God; thou hast lived as it were in paradise all thy days, hast had a full enjoyment of every thing that is good for food or pleasant to the eyes, and an uncontroverted dominion over all about thee, as Adam had.”* One instance of the magnificence of the king of Tyre is, that he outdid all other princes in jewels, which those have the greatest plenty of that trade most abroad, as he did: *Every precious stone was his covering*. There is a great variety of precious stones; but he had of every sort and in such plenty that besides what were treasured up in his cabinet, and were the ornaments of his crown, he had his clothes trimmed with them; they were his *covering*. Nay (v. 14), *he walked up and down*

*in the midst of the stones of fire*, that is, these precious stones, which glittered and sparkled like fire. His rooms were in a manner set round with jewels, so that he walked in the midst of them, and then fancied himself as glorious as if, like God, he had been surrounded by so many angels, who are compared to a *flame of fire*. And, if he be such an admirer of precious stones as to think them as bright as angels, no wonder that he is such an admirer of himself as to think himself as great as God. Nine several sorts of precious stones are here named, which were all in the high priest's ephod. Perhaps they are particularly named because he, in his pride, used to speak particularly of them, and tell those about him, with a great deal of foolish pleasure, “This is such a precious stone, of such a value, and so and so are its virtues.” Thus is he upbraided with his vanity. *Gold* is mentioned last, as far inferior in value to those precious stones; and he used to speak of it accordingly. Another thing that made him think his palace a paradise was the curious music he had, the *tabrets and pipes*, hand-instruments and wind-instruments. The *workmanship* of these was extraordinary, and they were prepared for him on purpose; prepared *in thee*, the pronoun is feminine—*in thee*, O Tyre! or it denotes that the king was effeminate in doting on such things. They were prepared *in the day he was created*; that is, either born, or created king; they were made on purpose to celebrate the joys either of his birth-day or of his coronation-day. These he prided himself much in, and would have all that came to see his palace take notice of them. (3.) He looked like an incarnate angel (v. 14): *Thou art the anointed cherub that covers or protects*; that is, he looked upon himself as a guardian angel to his people, so bright, so strong, so faithful, appointed to this office and qualified for it. Anointed kings should be to their subjects as anointed cherubim, that cover them with the wings of their power; and, when they are such, God will own them. Their advancement was from him: *I have set thee so*. Some think, because mention was made of Eden, that it refers to the cherub set on the east of Eden to cover it, Gen. iii. 24. He thought himself as able to guard his city from all invaders as that angel was for his charge. Or it may refer to the cherubim in the most holy place, whose wings covered the ark; he thought himself as bright as one of them. (4.) He appeared in as much splendour as the high priest when he was clothed with his garments for glory and beauty: *“Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God, as president of the temple built on that holy mountain; thou didst look as great, and with as much majesty and authority, as ever the high priest did when he walked in the temple, which was garnished with pre-*

*cious stones* (2 Chron. iii. 6), and had his habit on, which had precious stones both in the breast and on the shoulders; in that he seemed to walk in the midst of the stones of fire. Thus glorious is the king of Tyre; at least he thinks himself so.

2. Let us now see what was the ruin of the king of Tyre, what it was that stained his glory and laid all this honour in the dust (v. 15): "*Thou wast perfect in thy ways; thou didst prosper in all thy affairs and every thing went well with thee; thou hadst not only a clear, but a bright reputation, from the day thou wast created, the day of thy accession to the throne, till iniquity was found in thee; and that spoiled all.*" This may perhaps allude to the deplorable case of the angels that fell, and of our first parents, both of whom were perfect in their ways till iniquity was found in them. And when iniquity was once found in him it increased; he grew worse and worse, as appears (v. 18): "*Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries; thou hast lost the benefit of all that which thou thoughtest sacred, and in which, as in a sanctuary, thou thoughtest to take refuge; these thou hast defiled, and so exposed thyself by the multitude of thy iniquities.*" Now observe,

(1.) What the iniquity was that was the ruin of the king of Tyre. [1.] *The iniquity of his traffic* (so it is called, v. 18), both his and his people's, for their sin is charged upon him, because he connived at it and set them a bad example (v. 16): *By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thus thou hast sinned.* The king had so much to do with his merchandise, and was so wholly intent upon the gains of that, that he took no care to do justice, to give redress to those that suffered wrong and to protect them from violence; nay, in the multiplicity of business, wrong was done to many by oversight; and in his dealings he made use of his power to invade the rights of those he dealt with. Note, Those that have much to do in the world are in great danger of doing much amiss; and it is hard to deal with many without violence to some. Trades are called mysteries; but too many make them mysteries of iniquity. [2.] His pride and vain-glory (v. 17): "*Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou wast in love with thyself, and thy own shadow.* And thus *thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of the brightness, the pomp and splendour, wherein thou livedst.*" He gazed so much upon this that it dazzled his eyes and prevented him from seeing his way. He appeared so puffed up with his greatness that it bereaved him both of his wisdom and of the reputation of it. He really became a fool in glorying. Those make a bad bargain for themselves that part with their wisdom for the gratifying of their gaiety, and, to please a vain humour, lose a real excellency.

(2.) What the ruin was that this iniquity brought him to. [1.] He was thrown out of his dignity and dislodged from his palace, which he took to be his paradise and temple (v. 16): *I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God.* His kingly power was high as a mountain, setting him above others; it was a mountain of God, for the powers that be are ordained of God, and have something in them that is sacred; but, having abused his power, he is reckoned profane, and is therefore deposed and expelled. He disgraces the crown he wears, and so has forfeited it, and shall be destroyed from the midst of the stones of fire, the precious stones with which his palace was garnished, as the temple was; and they shall be no protection to him. [2.] He was exposed to contempt and disgrace, and trampled upon by his neighbours: "*I will cast thee to the ground* (v. 17), will cast thee among the pavement-stones, from the midst of the precious stones, and will lay thee a rueful spectacle before kings, that they may behold thee and take warning by thee not to be proud and oppressive." [3.] He was quite consumed, his city and he in it: *I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee.* The conquerors, when they have plundered the city, will kindle a fire in the heart of it, which shall lay it, and the palace particularly, in ashes. Or it may be taken more generally for the fire of God's judgments, which shall devour both prince and people, and bring all the glory of both to ashes upon the earth; and this fire shall be brought forth from the midst of thee. All God's judgments upon sinners take rise from themselves; they are devoured by a fire of their own kindling. [4.] He was hereby made a terrible example of divine vengeance. Thus he is reduced in the sight of all those that behold him (v. 18): *Those that know him shall be astonished at him, and shall wonder how one that stood so high could be brought so low.* The king of Tyre's palace, like the temple at Jerusalem, when it is destroyed shall be an astonishment and a hissing, 2 Chron. vii. 20, 21. So fell the king of Tyre.

20 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 21 Son of man, set thy face against Zidon, and prophesy against it, 22 And say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Zidon; and I will be glorified in the midst of thee: and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. 23 For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets: and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon



her on every side; and they shall know that *I am the LORD*. 24 And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor *any* grieving thorn of all *that are* round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that *I am the Lord God*. 25 Thus saith the Lord God; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. 26 And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that *I am the LORD their God*.

God's glory is his great end, both in all the good and in all the evil which *proceed out of the mouth of the Most High*; so we find in these verses. 1. God will be glorified in the destruction of Zidon, a city that lay near to Tyre, was more ancient, but not so considerable, had a dependence upon it and stood and fell with it. God says here, *I am against thee, O Zidon! and I will be glorified in the midst of thee*, v. 22. And again, "Those that would not know by gentler methods shall be made to know that *I am the Lord*, and I alone, and that I am a just and jealous God, *when I shall have executed judgments in her*, destroying judgments, when I shall have done execution according to justice and according to the sentence passed, and so shall be sanctified in her." The Zidonians, it should seem, were more addicted to idolatry than the Tyrians were, who, being men of business and large conversation, were less under the power of bigotry and superstition. The Zidonians were noted for the worship of Ashtaroth; Solomon introduced it, 1 Kings xi. 5. Jezebel was daughter to the king of Zidon, who brought the worship of Baal into Israel (1 Kings xvi. 31); so that God had been much dishonoured by the Zidonians. Now, says he, *I will be glorified, I will be sanctified*. The Zidonians were borderers upon the land of Israel, where God was known, and where they might have got the knowledge of him and have learned to glorify him; but, instead of that, they seduced Israel to the worship of their idols. Note, When God is sanctified he is glorified, for his holiness is his glory; and those whom he is not sanctified and glorified by he will be sanctified and glorified upon, by executing

judgments upon them, which declare him a just avenger of his own and his people's injured honour. The judgments that shall be executed upon Zidon are war and pestilence, two wasting depopulating judgments, v. 23. They are God's messengers, which he sends on his errands, and they shall accomplish that for which he sends them. *Pestilence and blood shall be sent into her streets*; there the dead bodies of those shall lie who perished, some by the plague, occasioned perhaps through ill diet when the city was besieged, and some by the sword of the enemy, most likely the Chaldean armies, when the city was taken, and all were put to the sword. Thus the wounded shall be judged; when they are dying of their wounds they shall judge themselves, and others shall say, *They justly fall*. Or, as some read it, *They shall be punished by the sword*, that sword which has commission to destroy on every side. It is God that judges, and he will overcome. Nor is it Tyre and Zidon only on which God would execute judgments, but on all those that despised his people Israel, and triumphed in their calamities; for this was now God's controversy with the nations that were round about them, v. 26. Note, When God's people are under his correcting hand for their faults he takes care, as he did concerning malefactors, that were scourged, *that they shall not seem vile* to those that are about them, and therefore takes it ill of those who despise them and so *help forward the affliction* when he is but a little displeased, Zech. i. 15. God regards them even in their low estate; and therefore let not men despise them. 2. God will be glorified in the restoration of his people to their former safety and prosperity. God had been dishonoured by the sins of his people, and their sufferings too had given occasion to the enemy to blaspheme (Isa. lii. 5); but God will now both cure them of their sins and ease them of their troubles, and so *will be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen*, will recover the honour of his holiness, to the satisfaction of all the world, v. 25. For, (1.) They shall return to the possession of their own land again: *I will gather the house of Israel out of their dispersions*, in answer to that prayer (Ps. cvi. 47), *Save us, O Lord our God! and gather us from among the heathen*; and in pursuance of that promise (Deut. xxx. 4), *Thence will the Lord thy God gather thee*. Being gathered, they shall be brought in a body, *to dwell in the land that I have given to my servant Jacob*. God had an eye to the ancient grant, in bringing them back, for that remained in force, and the discontinuance of the possession was not a defeasance of the right. He that gave it will again give it. (2.) They shall enjoy great tranquillity there. When those that have been vexatious to them are taken off they shall live in quietness; there shall be no more a pricking brier

nor a grieving thorn, v. 24. They shall have a happy settlement, for they shall *build houses*, and *plant vineyards*; and they shall enjoy a happy security and serenity there; they shall  *dwell safely*, shall  *dwell with confidence*, and there shall be none to disquiet them or make them afraid, v. 26. This never had a full accomplishment in the body of that people, for after their return out of captivity they were ever and anon molested by some bad neighbour or other. Nor has the gospel-church been ever quite free from pricking briers and grieving thorns; yet sometimes *the church has rest*, and believers always dwell safely under the divine protection and may be  *quiet from the fear of evil*. But the full accomplishment of this promise is reserved for the heavenly Canaan, when all the saints shall be gathered together, and every thing that offends shall be removed, and all griefs and fears for ever banished.

## CHAP. XXIX.

Three chapters we had concerning Tyre and its king; next follow four chapters concerning Egypt and its king. This is the first of them. Egypt had formerly been a house of bondage to God's people; of late they had had but too friendly a correspondence with it, and had depended too much upon it; and therefore, whether the prediction reached Egypt or no, it would be of use to Israel, to take them off from their confidence in their alliance with it. The prophecies against Egypt, which are all laid together in these four chapters, were of five several dates; the first in the 10th year of the captivity (ver. 1), the second in the 27th (ver. 17), the third in the 11th year and the first month (ch. xxx. 20), the fourth in the 11th year and the third month (ch. xxxi. 1), the fifth in the 12th year (ch. xxxii. 1), and another in the same year, ver. 17. In this chapter we have, I. The destruction of Pharaoh foretold, for his *jealousy deceitfully with Israel*, ver. 1—7. II. The desolation of the land of Egypt foretold, ver. 8—12. III. A promise of the restoration thereof, in part, after forty years, ver. 13—16. IV. The possession that should be given to Nebuchadnezzar of the land of Egypt, ver. 17—20. V. A promise of mercy to Israel, ver. 21.

**I**N the tenth year, in the tenth month, in the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt: 3 Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I  *am* against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river  *is* mine own, and I have made  *it* for myself. 4 But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales. 5 And I will leave thee  *thrown* into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers: thou shalt fall upon the open fields; thou shalt not be brought together, nor gathered: I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the field and to the

fowls of the heaven. 6 And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I  *am* the LORD, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. 7 When they took hold of thee by thy hand, thou didst break, and rend all their shoulder: and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to be at a stand.

Here is, I. The date of this prophecy against Egypt. It was in the  *tenth year of the captivity*, and yet it is placed after the prophecy against Tyre, which was delivered in the eleventh year, because, in the accomplishment of the prophecies, the destruction of Tyre happened before the destruction of Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar's gaining Egypt was the reward of his service against Tyre; and  *therefore* the prophecy against Tyre is put first, that we may the better observe that. But particular notice must be taken of this, that the first prophecy against Egypt was just at the time when the king of Egypt was coming to relieve Jerusalem and raise the siege (Jer. xxxvii. 5), but did not answer the expectations of the Jews from them. Note, It is good to foresee the failing of all our creature-confidences, then when we are most in temptation to depend upon them, that we may  *cease from man*.

II. The scope of this prophecy. It is directed against  *Pharaoh king of Egypt, and against all Egypt*, v. 2. The prophecy against Tyre began with the people, and then proceeded against the prince. But this begins with the prince, because it began to have its accomplishment in the insurrections and rebellions of the people against the prince, not long after this.

III. The prophecy itself. Pharaoh Hophrah (for so was the reigning Pharaoh surnamed) is here represented by a  *great dragon*, or crocodile, that  *lies in the midst of his rivers*, as Leviathan in the waters, to  *play therein*, v. 3. Nilus, the river of Egypt, was famed for crocodiles. And what is the king of Egypt, in God's account, but a  *great dragon*, venomous and mischievous? Therefore says God,  *I am against thee. I am above thee*; so it may be read. How high soever the princes and potentates of the earth are, there is a  *higher than they* (Eccl. v. 8), a God above them, that can control them, and, if they be tyrannical and oppressive, a God against them, that will be free to reckon with them. Observe here,

1. The pride and security of Pharaoh. He  *lies in the midst of his rivers*, rolls himself with a great deal of satisfaction in his wealth and pleasures; and he says,  *My river is my own*. He boasts that he is an absolute prince (his subjects are his vassals; Joseph bought them long ago, Gen. xlvii. 23), that he is a sole prince, and has neither partner



in the government nor competitor for it,—that he is out of debt (what he has is his own, and none of his neighbours have any demands upon him),—that he is independent, neither tributary nor accountable to any. Note, Worldly carnal minds please themselves with, and pride themselves in, their property, forgetting that whatever we have we have only the use of it, the property is in God. We ourselves are not our own, but his. *Our tongues are not our own*, Ps. xii. 4. Our river is not our own, for its springs are in God. The most potent prince cannot call what he has his own, for, though it be so against all the world, it is not so against God. But Pharaoh's reason for his pretensions is yet more absurd: *My river is my own, for I have made it for myself*. Here he usurps two of the divine prerogatives, to be the author and the end of his own being and felicity. He only that is the great Creator can say of this world, and of every thing in it, *I have made it for myself*. He calls his river his own because he *looks not unto the Maker thereof, nor has respect unto him that fashioned it long ago*, Isa. xxii. 11. What we have we have received from God and must use for God, so that we cannot say, We made it, much less, We made it for ourselves; and why then do we boast? Note, Self is the great idol that all the world worships, in contempt of God and his sovereignty.

2. The course God will take with this proud man, to humble him. He is a great dragon in the waters, and God will accordingly deal with him, v. 4, 5. (1.) He will draw him out of his rivers, for he has *a hook and a cord* for this *leviathan*, with which he can manage him, though none on earth can (Job xli. 1): *"I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, will cast thee out of thy palace, out of thy kingdom, out of all those things in which thou takest such a complacency and placest such a confidence."* Herodotus relates of this Pharaoh, who was now king of Egypt, that he had reigned in great prosperity for twenty-five years, and was so elevated with his successes that he said that *God himself could not cast him out of his kingdom*; but he shall soon be convinced of his mistake, and what he depended on shall be no defence. God can force men out of that in which they are most secure and easy. (2.) *All his fish* shall be drawn out with him, his servants, his soldiers, and all that had a dependence on him, as he thought, but really such as he had dependence upon. These shall *stick to his scales*, adhere to their king, resolving to live and die with him. But, (3.) The king and his army, the dragon and all the fish that stick to his scales, shall perish together, as fish cast upon dry ground, and shall be *meat to the beasts and fowls*, v. 5. Now this is supposed to have had its accomplishment soon after, when this Pharaoh, in defence of Aričius king of Libya, who had been expelled

his kingdom by the Cyremans, levied a great army, and went out against the Cyrenians, to re-establish his friend, but was defeated in battle, and all his forces were put to flight, which gave such disgust to his kingdom that they rose in rebellion against him. Thus was he left *thrown into the wilderness, he and all the fish of the river* with him. Thus issue men's pride, and presumption, and carnal security. Thus men justly lose what they might call their own, under God, when they call it their own against him.

3. The ground of the controversy God has with the Egyptians; it is because they have cheated his people. They encouraged them to expect relief and assistance from them when they were in distress, but failed them (v. 6, 7): *Because they have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel*. They pretended to be a staff for them to lean upon, but, when any stress was laid upon them, they were either weak and could not or treacherous and would not do that for them which was expected. They *broke under them*, to their great disappointment and amazement, so that they *rent their shoulder and made all their loins to be at a stand*. The king of Egypt, it is probable, had encouraged Zedekiah to break his league with the king of Babylon, with a promise that he would stand by him, which, when he failed to do, to any purpose, it could not but put them into a great consternation. God had told them, long since, that the Egyptians were broken reeds, Isa. xxx. 6, 7. Rabshakeh had told them so, Isa. xxxvi. 6. And now they found it so. It was indeed the folly of Israel to trust them, and they were well enough served when they were deceived in them. God was righteous in suffering them to be so. But that is no excuse at all for the Egyptians' falsehood and treachery, nor shall it secure them from the judgments of that God who is and will be the avenger of all such wrongs. It is a great sin, and very provoking to God, as well as unjust, ungrateful, and very dishonourable and unkind, to put a cheat upon those that put a confidence in us.

8 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring a sword upon thee, and cut off man and beast out of thee. 9 And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it. 10 Behold, therefore I *am* against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. 11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot

of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. 12 And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries *that are desolate*, and her cities among the cities *that are laid waste* shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. 13 Yet thus saith the Lord God; At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the people whither they were scattered: 14 And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return *into* the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation; and they shall be there a base kingdom. 15 It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. 16 And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth *their* iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I *am* the Lord God.

This explains the foregoing prediction, which was figurative, and looks something further. Here is a prophecy.

I. Of the ruin of Egypt. The threatening of this is very full and particular; and the sin for which this ruin shall be brought upon them is their pride, *v. 9*. They said, *The river is mine and I have made it*; therefore their land shall spue them out. 1. God is against them, both against the king and against the people, *against thee and against thy rivers*. Waters signify people and multitudes, *Rev. xvii. 15*. 2. Multitudes of them shall be cut off by the sword of war, a sword which God will bring upon them to destroy both man and beast, the sword of civil war. 3. The country shall be depopulated. *The land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste (v. 9)*, the country not cultivated, the cities not inhabited. The wealth of both was their pride, and that God will take away. *It shall be utterly waste (wastes of waste, so the margin reads it), and desolate (v. 10); neither men nor beasts shall pass through it, nor shall it be inhabited (v. 11); it shall be desolate in the midst of the countries that are so, v. 12*. This was the effect not so much of those wars spoken of before, which were made by them, but of the war which the king of Babylon made upon them. It shall be desolate from one end of the land to the other, *from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia*.

The sin of pride is enough to ruin a whole nation. 4. The people shall be dispersed and scattered among the nations (*v. 12*), so that those who thought the balance of power was in their hand should now become a contemptible people. Such a fall does a haughty spirit go before.

II. Of the restoration of Egypt after awhile, *v. 13*. Egypt shall lie *desolate forty years (v. 12)* and then *I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, v. 14*. Some date the forty years from Nebuchadnezzar's destroying Egypt, others from the desolation of Egypt some time before; however, they end about the first year of Cyrus, when the seventy years' captivity of Judah ended, or soon after. Then this prediction was accomplished, 1. That God will gather the Egyptians out of all the countries into which they were dispersed, and make them to *return to the land of their habitation*, and give them a settlement there again, *v. 14*. Note, Though God will find out a way to humble the proud, yet he will not contend for ever, no, not with them in this world. 2. That yet they shall not make a figure again as they have done. Egypt shall be *a kingdom* again, but it shall be the *basest of the kingdoms (v. 15)*; it shall have but little wealth and power, and shall not extend its conquests as formerly; it shall be the tail of the nations, and not the head. It is a mercy that it shall become a kingdom again, but, to humble it, it shall be a despicable kingdom; it shall be a long time before it recover any thing like its ancient lustre. For two reasons it shall be thus mortified:—(1.) That it may not domineer over its neighbours, that it may not *exalt itself above the nations*, nor *rule over the nations*, as it has done, but that it may know what it is to be low and despised. Note, Those who abuse their power will justly be stripped of it; and God, as King of nations, will find out a way to maintain the injured rights and liberties, not only of his own, but of other nations. (2.) That it may not deceive the people of God (*v. 16*): *It shall no more be the confidence of the house of Israel*; they shall no more be in temptation to trust in it as they have done, which is a sin that *brings their iniquity to remembrance*, that is, provokes God to punish them not for that only, but for all their other sins. Or it *puts them in mind* of their idolatries to return to them, *when they look to the idolaters*, to repose a confidence in them. Note, The creatures we confide in are often *therefore* ruined, because there is no other way effectually to cure us of our confidence in them. Rather than Israel shall be ensnared again, the whole land of Egypt shall be laid waste. He that once *gave Egypt for their ransom (Isa. xliii. 3)* will now give Egypt for their cure; and it shall be destroyed rather than Israel shall not in this particular be reformed. God, not only in justice, but in wisdom and goodness to us, breaks those creature-stays



which we lean too much upon, and makes them to be no more, that they may be no more our confidence.

17 And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first *month*, in the first *day* of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 18 Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head *was* made bald, and every shoulder *was* peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: 19 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. 20 I have given him the land of Egypt *for* his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God. 21 In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth in the midst of them; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

The date of this prophecy is observable; it was in the twenty-seventh year of Ezekiel's captivity, sixteen years after the prophecy in the former part of the chapter, and almost as long after those which follow in the next chapters; but it comes in here for the explanation of all that was said against Egypt. After the destruction of Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar spent two or three campaigns in the conquest of the Ammonites and Moabites and making himself master of their countries. Then he spent thirteen years in the siege of Tyre. During all that time the Egyptians were embroiled in war with the Cyrenians and one with another, by which they were very much weakened and impoverished; and just at the end of the siege of Tyre God delivers this prophecy to Ezekiel, to signify to him that that utter destruction of Egypt which he had foretold fifteen or sixteen years before, which had been but in part accomplished hitherto, should now be completed by Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy which begins here, it should seem, is continued to the twentieth verse of the next chapter. And Dr. Lightfoot observes that it is the last prophecy we have of this prophet, and should have been last in the book, but is laid here, that all the prophecies against Egypt might come together. The particular destruction of Pharaoh-Hophrah, foretold in the former

part of this chapter, was likewise foretold Jer. xlv. 30. This general devastation of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar was foretold Jer. xliii. 10. Observe,

I. What success God would give to Nebuchadnezzar and his forces against Egypt. God gave him *that land*, that he might *take the spoil and prey* of it, v. 19, 20. It was a cheap and easy prey. He subdued it with very little difficulty; the blood and treasure expended upon the conquest of it were inconsiderable. But it was a rich prey, and he carried off a great deal from it that was of value. Their having been divided among themselves, no doubt, gave a common enemy great advantage against them, who, when they had been so long preying upon one another, soon made a prey of them all. *En! quo discordia cives perduxit miseros—What wretchedness does civil discord bring!* Jeremiah foretold that Nebuchadnezzar should *array himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd puts on his coat*, which intimates what a rich and cheap prey it should be.

II. Upon what considerations God would give Nebuchadnezzar this success against Egypt; it was to be a recompence to him for the hard service with which he had caused his army to serve against Tyre, v. 18, 20. 1. The taking of Tyre was a tedious piece of work; it cost Nebuchadnezzar abundance of blood and treasure. It held out thirteen years; all that time the Chaldean army was hard at it, to make themselves masters of it. A large current of the sea, between Tyre and the continent, was filled up with earth, and many other difficulties which were thought insuperable they had to struggle with; but so great a prince, having begun such an undertaking, thought himself bound in honour to push it on, whatever it cost him. How many thousand lives have been sacrificed to such points of honour as this was! In prosecuting this siege *every head was made bald, and every shoulder peeled*, with carrying burdens and labouring in the water when they had a strong tide and a strong town to contend with. Egypt, a large kingdom, being divided within itself is easily conquered; Tyre, a single city, being unanimous, is with difficulty subdued. Those that have much to do in the world find some affairs go on a great deal more readily and easily than others. But, 2. In this service God owns that they *wrought for him*, v. 20. He set them at work, for the humbling of a proud city and its king, though *they meant not so, neither did their heart think so*, who were employed in it. Note, Even great men and bad men are tools that God makes use of, and are *working for him* even when they are pursuing their own covetous and ambitious designs; so wonderfully does God overrule all to his own glory. Yet, 3. For this service he had *no wages nor his army*. He was at a vast expense to take Tyre; and when he had it, though it was

a very rich city, and he promised himself good plunder for his army from it, he was disappointed; the Tyrians sent away by ship their best effects, and threw the rest into the sea, so that they had nothing but bare walls. Thus are the children of this world ordinarily frustrated in their highest expectations from it. Therefore, 4. He shall have the spoil of Egypt to recompense him for his service against Tyre. Note, God will be behind-hand with none for any service they do for him, but, one way or other, will recompense them for it; none shall kindle a fire on his altar for nought. The service done for him by worldly men, with worldly designs, shall be recompensed with a mere worldly reward, which his faithful servants, that have a sincere regard to his will and glory, would not be put off with. This accounts for the prosperity of wicked men in this world; God is in it paying them for some service or other, in which he has made use of them. *Verily they have their reward.* Let none envy it them. The conquest of Egypt is spoken of as Nebuchadnezzar's *full reward*, for that completed his dominion over the then known world in a manner; that was the last of the kingdoms he subdued; when he was master of that he became the *head of gold*.

III. The mercy God had in store for the house of Israel soon after. When the tide is at the highest it will turn, and so it will when it is at the lowest. Nebuchadnezzar was in the zenith of his glory when he had conquered Egypt, but within a year after he ran mad (Dan. iv.), was so seven years, and within a year or two after he had recovered his senses he resigned his life. When he was at the highest Israel was at the lowest; then were they in the depth of their captivity, their bones dead and dry; but *in that day the horn of the house of Israel shall bud forth*, v. 21. The day of their deliverance shall begin to dawn, and they shall have some little reviving in their bondage, in the honour that shall be done, 1. To their princes; they are the *horns of the house of Israel*, the seat of their glory and power. \*These began to bud forth when Daniel and his fellows were highly preferred in Babylon; Daniel sat in the gate of the city; *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were set over the affairs of the province* (Dan. ii. 49); these were all of the *king's seed, and of the princes*, Dan. i. 3. And it was within a year after the conquest of Egypt that they were thus preferred; and, soon after, three of them were made famous by the honour God put upon them in bringing them alive out of the burning fiery furnace. This might very well be called the *budding forth of the horn of the house of Israel*. And, some years after, this promise had a further accomplishment in the enlargement and elevation of Jehoiachin king of Judah, Jer. lli. 31, 32. They were both tokens of God's favour to Israel, and happy omens. 2. To their prophets: And *I will give thee the open-*

*ing of the mouth.* Though none of Ezekiel's prophecies, after this, are recorded, yet we have reason to think he went on prophesying, and with more liberty and boldness, when Daniel and his fellows were in power, and would be ready to protect him not only from the Babylonians, but from the wicked ones of his own people. Note, It bodes well to a people when God enlarges the liberties of his ministers and they are countenanced and encouraged in their work.

## CHAP. XXX.

In this chapter we have, I. A continuation of the prophecy against Egypt, which we had in the latter part of the foregoing chapter, just before the desolation of that once flourishing kingdom was completed by Nebuchadnezzar, in which is foretold the destruction of all her allies and confederates, all her interests and concerns, and the several steps which the king of Babylon should take in pushing on this destruction, ver. 1—19. II. A repetition of a former prophecy against Egypt, just before the desolation of it began by their own bad conduct, which gradually weakened them and prepared the way for the king of Babylon, ver. 20—26. It is all much to the same purport with what we had before.

THE word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Howl ye, Woe worth the day! 3 For the day *is* near, even the day of the LORD *is* near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen. 4 And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down. 5 Ethiopia, and Libya, and Lydia, and all the mingled people, and Chub, and the men of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword. 6 Thus saith the LORD; They also that uphold Egypt shall fall; and the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Syene shall they fall in it by the sword, saith the Lord God. 7 And they shall be desolate in the midst of the countries *that are* desolate, and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities *that are* wasted. 8 And they shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and *when* all her helpers shall be destroyed. 9 In that day shall messengers go forth from me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid, and great pain shall come upon them, as in the day of Egypt: for, lo, it cometh. 10 Thus saith the Lord God; I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. 11 He and his people with him, the ter-



rible of the nations, shall be brought to destroy the land: and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain. 12 And I will make the rivers dry, and sell the land into the hand of the wicked: and I will make the land waste, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I the LORD have spoken *it*. 13 Thus saith the Lord God; I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause *their* images to cease out of Noph; and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. 14 And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgments in No. 15 And I will pour my fury upon Sin, the strength of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. 16 And I will set fire in Egypt: Sin shall have great pain, and No shall be rent asunder, and Noph *shall have* distresses daily. 17 The young men of Aven and of Pi-beseth shall fall by the sword: and these *cities* shall go into captivity. 18 At Tehaphnehes also the day shall be darkened, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt: and the pomp of her strength shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity. 19 Thus will I execute judgments in Egypt: and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

The prophecy of the destruction of Egypt is here very full and particular, as well as, in the general, very frightful. What can protect a provoking people when the righteous God comes forth to contend with them?

I. It shall be a very lamentable destruction, and such as shall occasion great sorrow (v. 2, 3): "*Howl you; you may justly shriek now that it is coming, for you will be made to shriek and make hideous outcries when it comes. Cry out, Woe worth the day! or, Ah the day! alas because of the day! the terrible day! Woe and alas! For the day is near; the day we have so long dreaded, so long deserved. It is the day of the Lord, the day in which he will manifest himself as a God of vengeance. You have your day now, when you carry all before you, and trample on all about you, but God will have his day shortly, the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment,*" Ps. xxxvii. 13. It will be a *cloudy day*, that is, dark and dismal, without the shining forth of any comfort; and it shall threaten a storm—*fire, and*

*brimstone, and a horrible tempest. It shall be the time of the heathen, of reckoning with the heathen for all their heathenish practices, that time which David spoke of when God would pour out his fury upon the heathen* (Ps. lxxix. 6), *when they should sink,* Ps. ix. 15.

II. It shall be the destruction of Egypt, and of all the states and countries in confederacy with her and in her neighbourhood.

1. Egypt herself shall fall (v. 4): *The sword shall come upon Egypt*, the sword of the Chaldeans, and it shall be a victorious sword, for *the slain shall fall in Egypt*, fall by it, fall before it. Is the country populous? *They shall take away her multitude.* Is it strong, and well-fixed? *Her foundations shall be broken down*, and then the fabric, though built ever so fine, ever so high, will fall of course. 2. Her neighbours and inmates shall fall with her. When the slain fall so thickly in Egypt *great pain shall be in Ethiopia*, both that in Africa, which is in the neighbourhood of Egypt on one side, and that in Asia, which is near to it on the other side. When their neighbour's house was on fire they could not but apprehend their own in danger; nor were their fears groundless, for they shall all *fall with them by the sword*, v. 5. *Ethiopia and Libya* (Cush and Phut, so the Hebrew names are, two of the sons of Ham who are mentioned, and Mizraim, that is, Egypt, between them, Gen. x. 6), *and the Lydians* (who were famous archers, and are spoken of as confederates with Egypt, Jer. xlv. 9), these shall fall with Egypt and *Chub* (the Chaldeans, the inhabitants of the inner Libya); these and others were the *mingled people*; there were those of all these and other countries who upon some account or other resided in Egypt, as did also *the men of the land that is in league*, some of the remains of the people of Israel and Judah, the *children of the covenant*, or league, as they are called (Acts iii. 25), the *children of the promise*, Gal. iv. 28. These sojourned in Egypt contrary to God's command, and these shall *fall with them*. Note, Those that will take their lot with God's enemies shall have their lot with them, yea, though they be in profession the men of the land that is in league with God.

III. All that pretend to support the sinking interests of Egypt shall come down under her, shall come down with her (v. 6): *Those that uphold Egypt shall fall*, and then Egypt must fall of course. See the justice of God; Egypt pretended to uphold Jerusalem when that was tottering, but proved a deceitful reed; and now those that pretended to uphold Egypt shall prove no better. Those that deceive others are commonly paid in their own coin; they are themselves deceived. 1. Does Egypt think herself upheld by the absolute authority and dominion of her king? *The pride of her power shall come down*, v. 6. The power of



the king of Egypt was his pride; but that shall be broken, and humbled. 2. Is the multitude of her people her support? These shall *fall by the sword*, even from the tower of Syene, which is in the utmost corner of the land, from that side of it by which the enemy shall enter. Both the *countries* and the *cities*, the husbandmen and the merchants, shall be desolate, v. 7, as before, ch. xxix. 12. Even the *multitude of Egypt shall be made to cease*, v. 10. That populous country shall be depopulated. The land shall be even *filled with the slain*, v. 11. 3. Is the river Nile her support, and are the several channels of it a defence to her? "*I will make the rivers dry* (v. 12), so that those natural fortifications which were thought impregnable, because impassable, shall stand them in no stead." 4. Are her idols a support to her? They shall be destroyed; those imaginary upholders shall appear more than ever to be imaginary, for so images are when they pretend to be deliverers and strongholds (v. 13): *I will cause their images to cease out of Noph*. 5. Is her royal family her support? *There shall be no more a prince in the land of Egypt*; the royal family shall be extirpated and extinguished, which had continued so long. 6. Is her courage her support, and does she think to uphold herself by the bravery of her men of war, who have now of late been inured to service? That shall fail: *I will put a fear in the land of Egypt*. 7. Is the rising generation her support? is she upheld by her children, and does she think herself happy because she has her quiver full of them? Alas! *the young men shall fall by the sword* (v. 17) and *the daughters shall go into captivity* (v. 18), and so she shall be robbed of all her hopes.

IV. God shall inflict these desolating judgments on Egypt (v. 8): *They shall know that I am the Lord*, and greater than all gods, than all their gods, when I have *set a fire in Egypt*. The fire that consumes nations is of God's kindling; and, when he sets fire to a people, *all their helpers shall be destroyed*. Those that go about to quench the fire shall themselves be devoured by it; for who can stand before him when he is angry? When he *pours out his fury* upon a place, when he sets fire to it (v. 15, 16), neither its strength nor its multitude can stand it in any stead.

V. The king of Babylon and his army shall be employed as instruments of this destruction: *The multitude of Egypt shall be made to cease* and be quite cut off *by the hand of the king of Babylon*, v. 10. Those that undertook to protect Israel from the king of Babylon shall not be able to protect themselves. It is said of the Chaldeans, who should destroy Egypt, 1. That they are *strangers* (v. 12), who therefore shall show no compassion for old acquaintance-sake, but shall behave strangely towards them. 2. That they are *the terrible of the nations* (v. 11), both in respect of force and in re-

spect of fierceness; and, being terrible, they shall make terrible work. (3.) That they are *the wicked*, who will not be restrained by reason and conscience, the laws of nature or the laws of nations, for they are without law. *I will sell the land into the hand of the wicked*. They do violence *unjustly*, as they are wicked; yet, so far as they are instruments in God's hand of executing his judgments, it is on his part justly done. Note, God often makes one wicked man a scourge to another; and even wicked men acquire a title to prey, *jure belli*—*by the laws of war*, for God *sells it into their hands*.

VI. No place in the land of Egypt shall be exempted from the fury of the Chaldean army, not the strongest, not the remotest. *The sword shall go through the land*. Various places are here named: *Pathros, Zoan, and No* (v. 14), *Sin and Noph* (v. 15, 16), *Aven and Pi-beseth* (v. 17), and *Tehophneh*, v. 18. These shall be made desolate, shall be fired, and God's judgments shall be executed upon them, and his fury poured out upon them. Their strength and multitude shall be *cut off*; they shall have *great pain*, shall be *rent asunder* with fear, and shall have *distresses daily*. Their *day shall be darkened*; their honours, comforts, and hopes, shall be extinguished. Their *yokes shall be broken*, so that they shall no more oppress and tyrannize as they have done. *The pomp of their strength shall cease*, and *a cloud shall cover them*, a cloud so thick that through it they shall not see any hopes, nor shall their glory be seen, or shine further. And, lastly, the Ethiopians, who are at a distance from them, as well as those who are mingled with them, shall share in their pain and terror. God will by his providence spread the rumour, and the *careless Ethiopians shall be made afraid*, v. 9. Note, God can strike a terror upon those that are most secure; fearfulness shall, when he pleases, surprise the most presumptuous hypocrites.

The close of this prediction leaves, 1. The land of Egypt mortified: *Thus will I execute judgments on Egypt*, v. 19. The destruction of Egypt is the *executing of judgments*, which intimates not only that it is done justly, for its sins, but that it is done regularly and legally, by a judicial sentence. All the executions God does are according to his judgments. 2. The God of Israel herein glorified: *They shall know that I am the Lord*. The Egyptians shall be made to know it and the people of God shall be made to know it better. *The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes*.

20 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 21 Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt;



and, lo, it shall not be bound up to be healed, to put a roller to bind it, to make it strong to hold the sword. 22 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I *am* against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. 23 And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. 24 And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. 25 But I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. 26 And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

This short prophecy of the weakening of the power of Egypt was delivered about the time that the army of the Egyptians, which attempted to raise the siege of Jerusalem, was frustrated in its enterprises, and returned *re infectâ*—without accomplishing their purpose; whereupon the king of Babylon renewed the siege and carried his point. The kingdom of Egypt was very ancient, and had been for many ages considerable. That of Babylon had but lately arrived at its great pomp and power, being built upon the ruins of the kingdom of Assyria. Now it is with them as it is with families and states, some are growing up, others are declining and going back; one must increase and the others must of course decrease.

I. It is here foretold that the king of Egypt shall grow weaker and weaker. The extent of his territories shall be abridged, his wealth and power shall be diminished, and he shall become less able than ever to help either himself or his friend. 1. This was in part done already (v. 21): *I have broken the arm of Pharaoh*, some time ago. One arm of that kingdom might well be reckoned broken when the king of Babylon routed the forces of Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish (Jer. xlvi. 2., and made himself master of *all that pertained to Egypt from the river of Egypt to Euphrates*, 2 Kings xxiv. 7. Egypt had been long in gathering strength and extending its dominions, and therefore, that there

may be a proportion observed in providence, it loses its strength slowly and by degrees. It was soon after the king of Egypt slew good king Josiah, and in the same reign, that its arm was thus broken, and it received that fatal blow which it never recovered. Before Egypt's heart and neck were broken its arm was. God's judgments come upon a people by steps, that they may meet him repenting. When the arm of Egypt is broken *it shall not be bound up to be healed*, for none can heal the wounds that God gives but he himself. Those whom he disarms, whom he disables, cannot again hold the sword. 2. This was to be done again. One arm was broken before, and something was done towards the setting of it, towards the healing of the deadly wound that was given to the beast. But now (v. 22), *I am against Pharaoh, and will break both his arms, both the strong and that which was broken* and set again. Note, If less judgments do not prevail to humble and reform sinners, God will send greater. Now God will *cause the sword to fall out of his hand*, which he caught hold of as thinking himself strong enough to hold it. It is repeated (v. 24), *I will break Pharaoh's arms*. He had been a cruel oppressor to the people of God formerly, and of late the *staff of a broken rod* to them; and now God by breaking his arms reckons with him for both. God justly breaks that power which is abused either to put wrongs upon people or to put cheats upon them. But this is not all; (1.) The king of Egypt shall be dispirited when he finds himself in danger of the king of Babylon's forces: he *shall groan before him with the groaning of a deadly wounded man*. Note, It is common for those that are most elated in their prosperity to be most dejected and disheartened in their adversity. Pharaoh, even before the sword touches him, shall groan as if he had received his death's wound. (2.) The people of Egypt shall be dispersed (v. 23 and again v. 26): *I will scatter them among the nations*. Other nations had mingled with them (v. 5); now they shall be mingled with other nations, and seek shelter in them, and so be made to know that the Lord is righteous.

II. It is here foretold that the king of Babylon shall grow stronger and stronger, v. 24, 25. It is said, and repeated, that God will, 1. *Put strength* into the king of Babylon's arms, that he may be able to go through the service he is designed for. 2. That he will *put a sword*, his sword, into the king of Babylon's hand, which signified his giving him a commission and furnishing him with arms for carrying on a war, particularly against Egypt. Note, As judges on the bench, like Pilate (John xix. 11), so generals in the field, like Nebuchadnezzar, have no power but what is given them from above.

## CHAP. XXXI.

The prophecy of this chapter, as the two chapters before, is against

Egypt, and designed for the humbling and mortifying of Pharaoh. In passing sentence upon great criminals it is usual to consult precedents, and to see what has been done to others in the like case, which serves both to direct and to justify the proceedings. Pharaoh stands indicted at the bar of divine justice for his pride and haughtiness, and the injuries he had done to God's people; but he thinks himself so high, so great, as not to be accountable to any authority, so strong, and so well guarded, as not to be conquerable by any force. The prophet is therefore directed to make a report to him of the case of the king of Assyria, whose head city was Nineveh. I. He must show him how great a monarch the king of Assyria had been, what a vast empire he had, what a mighty way he bore: the king of Egypt, great as he was, could not go beyond him, ver. 3-9. II. He must then show him how like he was to the king of Assyria in pride and carnal security, ver. 10. III. He must next read him the history of the fall and ruin of the king of Assyria, what a noise it made among the nations and what a warning it gave to all potent princes to take heed of pride, ver. 11-17. IV. He must leave the king of Egypt to apply all this to himself, to see his own face in the looking-glass of the king of Assyria's sin, and to foresee his own fall through the perspective glass of his ruin, ver. 18.

AND it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to his multitude; Whom art thou like in thy greatness? 3 Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of a high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. 4 The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. 5 Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. 6 All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. 7 Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters. 8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir-trees were not like his boughs, and the chesnut-trees were not like his branches; nor any tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty. 9 I have made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.

This prophecy bears date the month before Jerusalem was taken, as that in the close of the foregoing chapter about four months before. When God's people were in the

depth of their distress, it would be some comfort to them, as it would serve likewise for a check to the pride and malice of their neighbours, that insulted over them, to be told from heaven that the cup was going round, even the cup of trembling, that it would shortly be taken out of the hands of God's people and put into the hands of those that hated them, Isa. li. 22, 23. In this prophecy,

I. The prophet is directed to put Pharaoh upon searching the records for a case parallel to his own (v. 2): *Speak to Pharaoh and to his multitude*, to the multitude of his attendants, that contributed so much to his magnificence, and the multitude of his armies, that contributed so much to his strength. These he was proud of, these he put a confidence in; and they were as proud of him and trusted as much in him. Now ask him, *Whom art thou like in thy greatness?* We are apt to judge of ourselves by comparison. Those that think highly of themselves fancy themselves as great and as good as such and such, that have been mightily celebrated. The flatterers of princes tell them whom they equal in pomp and grandeur. "Well," says God, "let him pitch upon the most famous potentate that ever was, and it shall be allowed that he is like him in greatness and no way inferior to him; but, let him pitch upon whom he will, he will find that *his day came to fall*; he will see there was *an end* of all *his perfection*, and must therefore expect the end of his own in like manner." Note, The falls of others, both into sin and ruin, are intended as admonitions to us not to be secure or *high-minded*, nor to think we stand out of danger.

II. He is directed to show him an instance of one whom he resembles in greatness, and that was the Assyrian (v. 3), whose monarchy had continued from Nimrod. Sennacherib was one of the mighty princes of that monarchy; but it sunk down soon after him, and the monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar was built upon its ruins, or rather grafted upon its stock. Let us now see what a flourishing prince the king of Assyria was. He is here compared to a stately cedar, v. 3. The glory of the house of David is illustrated by the same similitude, ch. xvii. 3. The olive-tree, the fig-tree, and the vine, which were all fruit-trees, had refused to be promoted over the trees because they would not leave their fruitfulness (Judg. ix. 8, &c.), and therefore the choice falls upon the cedar, that is stately and strong, and casts a great shadow, but bears no fruit. 1. The Assyrian monarch was a tall cedar, such as the cedars in Lebanon generally were, of a *high stature*, and *his top among the thick boughs*; he was attended by other princes that were tributaries to him, and was surrounded by a life-guard of brave men. He surpassed all the princes in his neighbourhood; they were all shrubs to him (v. 5): *His height was exalted*



above all the trees of the field; they were many of them very high, but he overtopped them all, v. 8. The cedars, even those in the garden of Eden, which we may suppose were the best of the kind, *would not hide him*, but his top branches outshot theirs. 2. He was a spreading cedar; his branches did not only run up in height, but run out in breadth, denoting that this mighty prince was not only exalted to great dignity and honour, and had a name above the names of the great men of the earth, but that he obtained great dominion and power; his territories were large, and he extended his conquests far and his influences much further. This cedar, like a vine, sent forth his branches to the sea, to the river, Ps. lxxx. 11. *His boughs were multiplied; his branches became long* (v. 5); so that he had a shadowing shroud, v. 3. This contributed very much to his beauty, that he grew proportionably large as well as high. He was *fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches* (v. 7), very comely as well as very stately, *fair by the multitude of his branches*, v. 9. His large dominions were well managed, like a spreading tree that is kept in shape and good order by the skill of the gardener, so as to be very beautiful to the eye. His government was as amiable in the eyes of wise men as it was admirable in the eyes of all men. The fir-trees were not like his boughs, so straight, so green, so regular; nor were the branches of the chestnut-trees like his branches, so thick, so spreading. In short, *no tree in the garden of God*, in Eden, in Babylon (for that stood where paradise was planted), where there was every tree that was *pleasant to the sight* (Gen. ii. 9), was like to this cedar in beauty; that is, in all the surrounding nations there was no prince so much admired, so much courted, and whom every body was so much in love with, as the king of Assyria. Many of them did virtuously, but he excelled them all, outshone them all. *All the trees of Eden envied him*, v. 9. When they found they could not compare with him they were angry and grieved that he so far outdid them, and secretly grudged him the praise due to him. Note, It is the unhappiness of those who in any thing excel others that thereby they make themselves the objects of envy; and *who can stand before envy?* 3. He was serviceable, as far as a standing growing cedar could be, and that was only by his shadow (v. 6): *All the fowls of heaven, some of all sorts, made their nests in his boughs*, where they were sheltered from the injuries of the weather. The beasts of the field put themselves under the protection of his branches. There they were *levant—rising up, and couchant—lying down*; there they brought forth their young; for they had there a natural covert from the heat and from the storm. The meaning of all is, *Under his shadow dwelt all great nations*; they all fled to him for safety, and were willing to swear allegi-

ance to him if he would undertake to protect them, as travellers in a shower come under thick trees for shelter. Note, Those who have power ought to use it for the protection and comfort of those whom they have power over; for to that end they are entrusted with power. Even the bramble, if he be anointed king, invites the trees to come and *trust in his shadow*, Judg. ix. 15. But the utmost security that any creature, even the king of Assyria himself, can give, is but like the shadow of a tree, which is but a scanty and slender protection, and leaves a man many ways exposed. Let us therefore flee to God for protection, and he will take us *under the shadow of his wings*, where we shall be warmer and safer than under the shadow of the strongest and stateliest cedar, Ps. xvii. 8; xci. 4. 4. He seemed to be settled and established in his greatness and power. For, (1.) It was God that *made him fair*, v. 9. For by him kings reign. He was comely with the comeliness that God put upon him. Note, God's hand must be eyed and owned in the advancement of the great men of the earth, and therefore we must not envy them; yet that will not secure the continuance of their prosperity, for he that gave them their beauty, if they be deprived of it, knows how to turn it into deformity. (2.) He seemed to have a good bottom. This cedar was not like the *heath in the desert, made to inhabit the parched places* (Jer. xvii. 6); it was not a *root in a dry ground*, Isa. liii. 2. No; he had abundance of wealth to support his power and grandeur (v. 4): *The waters made him great*; he had vast treasures, large stores and magazines, which were as the *deep that set him up on high*, constant revenues coming in by taxes, customs, and crown-rents, which were as *rivers running round about his plants*; these enabled him to strengthen and secure his interests every where, for he *sent out his little rivers, or conduits, to all the trees of the field*, to water them; and when they had *maintenance from the king's palace* (Ezra iv. 14), and *their country was nourished by the king's country* (Acts xii. 20), they would be serviceable and faithful to him. Those that have wealth flowing upon them in great rivers find themselves obliged to send it out again in little rivers; for, *as goods are increased, those are increased that eat them*, and the more men have the more occasion they have for it; yea, and still the more they have occasion for. The branches of this cedar became long, because of the multitude of waters which fed them (v. 5 and 7); his root was by great waters, which seemed to secure it that its leaf should never wither (Ps. i. 3), that it should not see when heat came, Jer. xvii. 8. Note, Worldly people may seem to have an established prosperity, yet it only seems so, Job v. 3; Ps. xxxvii. 35.

10 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast lifted up

thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; 11 I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. 12 And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him. 13 Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches: 14 To the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves for their height, neither shoot up their top among the thick boughs, neither their trees stand up in their height, all that drink water: for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit. 15 Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. 16 I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth. 17 They also went down into hell with him unto *them that be slain with the sword*; and *they that were* his arm, *that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen*. 18 To whom art thou thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with *them that be slain by the sword*. This *is* Pharaoh

and all his multitude, saith the Lord God.

We have seen the king of Egypt resembling the king of Assyria in pomp, and power, and prosperity, how like he was to him in his greatness; now here we see,

I. How he does likewise resemble him in his pride, v. 10. For, as face answers to face in a glass, so does one corrupt carnal heart to another; and the same temptations of a prosperous state by which some are overcome are fatal to many others too. "*Thou, O king of Egypt! hast lifted up thyself in height*, hast been proud of thy wealth and power, ch. xxix. 3. And just so *he* (that is, the king of Assyria); when he had *shot up his top among the thick boughs his heart was immediately lifted up in his height*, and he grew insolent and imperious, set God himself at defiance, and trampled upon his people;" witness the messages and letter which *the great king, the king of Assyria*, sent to Hezekiah, Isa. xxxvi. 4. How haughtily does he speak of himself and his own achievements! how scornfully of that great and good man! There were other sins in which the Egyptians and the Assyrians did concur, particularly that of oppressing God's people, which is charged upon them both together (Isa. lii. 4); but here that sin is traced up to its cause, and that was pride; for it is the *contempt of the proud* that they are *filled with*. Note, When men's outward condition rises their minds commonly rise with it; and it is very rare to find a humble spirit in the midst of great advancements.

II. How he shall therefore resemble him in his fall; and for the opening of this part of the comparison,

1. Here is a history of the fall of the king of Assyria. For his part, says God (v. 11), *I have therefore*, because he was thus lifted up, *delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen*. Cyaxares, king of the Medes, in the twenty-sixth year of his reign, in conjunction with Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the first year of his reign, destroyed Nineveh, and with it the Assyrian empire. Nebuchadnezzar, though he was not then, yet afterwards became, very emphatically, *the mighty one of the heathen*, most mighty among them and most mighty over them, to prevail against them.

(1.) Respecting the fall of the Assyrian three things are affirmed:—[1.] It is God himself that orders his ruin: *I have delivered him into the hand of the executioner*; *I have driven him out*. Note, God is the Judge, who puts down one and sets up another (Ps. lxxv. 7); and when he pleases he can extirpate and expel those who think themselves, and seem to others, to have taken deepest root. And the mightiest ones of the heathens could not gain their point against those they contended with if the Almighty did not himself deliver them into their hands. [2.] It is his



own sin that procures his ruin : *I have driven him out for his wickedness.* None are driven out from their honour, power, and possessions, but it is *for their wickedness.* None of our comforts are ever lost but what have been a thousand times forfeited. If the wicked are *driven away*, it is *in their wickedness.* [3.] It is a *mighty one of the heathen* that shall be the instrument of his ruin ; for God often employs one wicked man in punishing another. *He shall surely deal with him*, shall know how to manage him, great as he is. Note, Proud imperious men will, sooner or later, meet with their match.

(2.) In this history of the fall of the Assyrian observe, [1.] A continuation of the similitude of the cedar. He grew very high, and extended his boughs very far ; but his day comes to fall. *First*, This stately cedar was *cropped* : *The terrible of the nations cut him off.* Soldiers, who being both armed and commissioned to kill, and slay, and destroy, may well be reckoned among the *terrible of the nations.* They have lopped off his branches first, have seized upon some parts of his dominion and forced them out of his hands ; so that in all *mountains and valleys* of the nations about, in the high-lands and low-lands, and *by all the rivers*, there were cities or countries that were broken off from the Assyrian monarchy, that had been subject to it, but had either revolted or were recovered from it. Its feathers were borrowed ; and, when every bird had fetched back its own, it was naked like the stump of a tree. *Secondly*, It was deserted : *All the people of the earth*, that had fled to him for shelter, have *gone down from his shadow and have left him.* When he was disabled to give them protection they thought they no longer owed him allegiance. Let not great men be proud of the number of those that attend them and have a dependence upon them ; it is only for what they can get. When Providence frowns upon them their retinue is soon dispersed and scattered from them. *Thirdly*, It was insulted over, and its fall triumphed in (v. 13) : *Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain*, to tread upon the broken branches of this cedar. Its fall is triumphed in by the other trees, who were angry to see themselves overtopped so much : *All the trees of Eden*, that were cut down and had fallen before him, *all that drank water* of the rain of heaven, as the stump of the tree that is left in the south is said to be *wet with the dew of heaven* (Dan. iv. 23) and to bud *through the scent of water* (Job xiv. 9), *shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth* when they see this proud cedar brought as low as themselves. *Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*—*To have companions in woe is a solace to those who suffer.* But, on the contrary, the trees of Lebanon, that are yet standing in their height and strength, *mourned for him*, and *the trees of the field fainted for him*, because they could

not but read their own destiny in his fall. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedar be shaken*, for they cannot expect to stand long, Zech. xi. 2. [2.] An explanation of the similitude of the cedar. By the cutting down of this cedar is signified the slaughter of this mighty monarch and all his adherents and supporters ; they are all *delivered to death*, to fall by the sword, as the cedar by the axe. He and his princes, who, he said, were *altogether kings*, go down to the grave, *to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men*, as common persons of no quality or distinction. *They died like men* (Ps. lxxxii. 7) ; they were carried away with *those that go down to the pit*, and their pomp did neither protect them nor descend after them. Again (v. 16), *He was cast down to hell with those that descend into the pit* ; he went into the state of the dead, and was buried as others are, in obscurity and oblivion. Again (v. 17), *They all that were his arm*, on whom he stayed, by whom he acted and exerted his power, *all that dwelt under his shadow*, his subjects and allies, and all that had any dependence on him, they all *went down* into ruin, down into the grave *with him*, unto *those that were slain with the sword*, to those that were cut off by untimely deaths before them, under the load of guilt and shame. When great men fall a great many fall with them, as a great many in like manner have fallen before them. [3.] What God designed, and aimed at, in bringing down this mighty monarch and his monarchy. He designed thereby, *First*, *To give an alarm* to the nations about, to put them all to a stand, to put them all to a gaze (v. 16) : *I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall.* They were all struck with astonishment to see so mighty a prince brought down thus. It gave a shock to all their confidences, every one thinking his turn would be next. *When he went down to the grave* (v. 15) *I caused a mourning*, a general lamentation, as the whole kingdom goes into mourning at the death of the king. In token of this general grief, *I covered the deep for him*, put that into black, gave a stop to business, in complaisance to this universal mourning. *I restrained the floods, and the great waters were stayed*, that they might run into another channel, that of lamentation. Lebanon particularly, the kingdom of Syria, that was sometimes in confederacy with the Assyrian, mourned for him ; as the allies of Babylon, Rev. xviii. 9. *Secondly*, *To give an admonition* to the nations about, and to their kings (v. 14) : *To the end that none of all the trees by the waters*, though ever so advantageously situated, *may exalt themselves for their height*, may be proud and conceited of themselves and *shoot up their top among the thick boughs*, looking disdainfully upon others, *nor stand upon themselves for their height*, confiding in their own politics and powers, as if they could never be brought down. Let them all take warning

by the Assyrian, for he once held up his head as high, and thought he kept his footing as firm, as any of them; but his pride went before his destruction, and his confidence failed him. Note, The fall of proud presumptuous men is intended for warning to others to keep humble. It would have been well for Nebuchadnezzar, who was himself active in bringing down the Assyrian, if he had taken the admonition.

2. Here is a prophecy of the fall of the king of Egypt in like manner, *v.* 18. He thought himself like the Assyrian *in glory and greatness*, over-topping *all the trees of Eden*, as the cypress does the shrubs. "*But thou also shalt be brought down*, with the other trees that are pleasant to the sight, as those in Eden. *'Thou shalt be brought to the grave*, to the nether or lower parts of the earth; thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, that die in their uncleanness, die ingloriously, die under a curse and at a distance from God; then shall those whom thou hast trampled upon triumph over thee, saying, *This is Pharaoh and all his multitude*. See how mean he looks, how low he lies; see what all his pomp and pride have come to; here is all that is left of him." Note, Great men and great multitudes, with the great figure and great noise they make in the world, when God comes to contend with them, will soon become little, less than nothing, such as Pharaoh and all his multitude.

## CHAP. XXXII.

Still we are upon the destruction of Pharaoh and Egypt, which is wonderfully enlarged upon, and with a great deal of emphasis. When we read so very much of Egypt's ruin, no less than six several prophecies at divers times delivered concerning it, we are ready to think, Surely there is some special reason for it. And, 1. Perhaps it may look as far back as the book of Genesis, where we find (*ch.* xv. 14) that God determined to judge Egypt for oppressing his people; and, though that was in part fulfilled in the plagues of Egypt and the drowning of Pharaoh, yet, in this destruction, here foretold, those old scores were reckoned for, and that was to have its full accomplishment. 11. Perhaps it may look as far forward as the book of the Revelation, where we find that the great enemy of the gospel-church, that makes war with the Lamb, is spiritually called Egypt, *Rev.* xi. 8. And, if so, the destruction of Egypt and its Pharaoh was a type of the destruction of that proud enemy; and between this prophecy of the ruin of Egypt and the prophecy of the destruction of the antichristian generation there is some analogy. We have two distinct prophecies in this chapter relating to Egypt, both in the same month, one on the 1st day, the other that day fortnight, probably both on the sabbath day. They are both lamentations, not only to signify how lamentable the fall of Egypt should be, but to intimate how much the prophet himself should lament it, from a generous principle of love to mankind. The destruction of Egypt is here represented under two similitudes 1.—1. The killing of a lion, or a whale, or some such devouring creature, *ver.* 1.—16. 2. The funeral of a great commander or captain-general, *ver.* 17.—32. The two prophecies of this chapter are much of the same length.

AND it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the

waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. 3 Thus saith the Lord God; I will therefore spread out my net over thee with a company of many people; and they shall bring thee up in my net. 4 Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will cause all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee. 5 And I will lay thy flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with thy height. 6 I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimmest, even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of thee. 7 And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. 8 All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God. 9 I will also vex the hearts of many people, when I shall bring thy destruction among the nations, into the countries which thou hast not known. 10 Yea, I will make many people amazed at thee, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for thee, when I shall brandish my sword before them; and they shall tremble at every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of thy fall. 11 For thus saith the Lord God; The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon thee. 12 By the swords of the mighty will I cause thy multitude to fall, the terrible of the nations, all of them: and they shall spoil the pomp of Egypt, and all the multitude thereof shall be destroyed. 13 I will destroy also all the beasts thereof from beside the great waters; neither shall the foot of man trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of beasts trouble them. 14 Then will I make their waters deep, and cause their rivers to run like oil, saith the Lord God. 15 When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country shall be destitute of that whereof it was full, when I shall smite all them that dwell therein, then shall they know that I



am the LORD. 16 This is the lamentation wherewith they shall lament her: the daughters of the nations shall lament her: they shall lament for her, *even* for Egypt, and for all her multitude, saith the Lord God.

Here, I. The prophet is ordered to *take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt*, v. 2. It concerns ministers to be much of a serious spirit, and, in order thereunto, to be frequent in taking up lamentations for the fall and ruin of sinners, as those that have not desired, but dreaded, the woeful day. Note, Ministers that would affect others with the things of God must make it appear that they are themselves affected with the miseries which sinners bring upon themselves by their sins. It becomes us to weep and tremble for those that will not weep and tremble for themselves, to try if thereby we may set them a weeping, set them a trembling.

II. He is ordered to show cause for that lamentation.

1. Pharaoh has been a troubler of the nations, even of his own nation, which he should have procured the repose of: He is *like a young lion of the nations* (v. 2), loud and noisy, hectoring and threatening as a lion when he roars. Great potentates, if they be tyrannical and oppressive, are in God's account no better than beasts of prey. He is *like a whale*, or dragon, like a crocodile (so some) *in the seas*, very turbulent and vexatious, as the *leviathan* that *makes the deep to boil like a pot*, Job xli. 31. When Pharaoh engaged in an unnecessary war with the Cyrenians he *came forth with his rivers*, with his armies, *troubled the waters*, disturbed his own kingdom and the neighbouring nations, *foiled the rivers*, and made them *muddy*. Note, A great deal of disquiet is often given to the world by the restless ambition and implacable resentments of proud princes. Ahab is he that troubles Israel, and not Elijah.

2. He that has troubled others must expect to be himself troubled; for the Lord is righteous, Josh. vii. 25.

(1.) This is set forth here by a comparison. Is Pharaoh like a *great whale*, which, when it comes up the river, gives great disturbance, a leviathan which Job cannot draw out with a hook? (Job xli. 1), yet God has a net for him which is large enough to enclose him and strong enough to secure him (v. 3): *I will spread my net over thee*, even the army of the Chaldeans, a *company of many people*; they shall force him out of his fastnesses, dislodge him out of his possessions, throw him like a great fish upon dry ground, *upon the open field* (v. 4), where, being out of his element, he must die of course, and be a prey to the birds and beasts, as was foretold, ch. xxix. 5. What can the strongest fish do to help itself when it is out of the water and lies gasping? *The flesh* of this great whale

shall be *laid upon the mountains* (v. 5) and the *valleys* shall be *filled with his height*. Such numbers of Pharaoh's soldiers shall be slain that the dead bodies shall be scattered upon the hills and there shall be heaps of them piled up in the valleys. Blood shall be shed in such abundance as to swell the rivers in the valleys. Or, Such shall be the bulk, such the height, of this leviathan, that, when he is laid upon the ground, he shall fill a valley. Such vast quantities of blood shall issue from this leviathan as shall *water the land of Egypt*, the land wherein *now he swims*, now he sports himself, v. 6. It shall reach to the mountains, and the waters of Egypt shall again be *turned into blood* by this means: *The rivers shall be full of thee*. The judgments executed upon Pharaoh of old are expressed by the *breaking of the heads of leviathan in the waters*, Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14. But now they go further; this old serpent not only has now his head bruised, but is all crushed to pieces.

(2.) It is set forth by a prophecy of the deep impression which the destruction of Egypt should make upon the neighbouring nations; it would put them all into a consternation, as the fall of the Assyrian monarchy did, ch. xxxi. 15, 16. When Pharaoh, who had been like a blazing burning torch, is *put out* and *extinguished* it shall make all about him look black, v. 7. The heavens shall be hung with black, the *stars darkened*, the sun eclipsed, and the moon be deprived of her borrowed light. It is from the upper world that this lower receives its light; and therefore (v. 8), when the *bright lights of heaven* are made dark above, darkness by consequence is set upon the land, upon the earth; so it shall be on the land of Egypt. Here the plague of darkness, which was upon Egypt of old for three days, seems to be alluded to, as, before, the turning of the waters into blood. For, when former judgments are forgotten, it is just that they should be repeated. When their privy-counsellors, and statesmen, and those that have the direction of the public affairs, are deprived of wisdom and made fools, and the things that belong to their peace are hidden from their eyes, then their lights are darkened and the land is in a mist. This is foretold, Isa. xix. 13. *The princes of Zoan have become fools*. Now upon the spreading of the report of the fall of Egypt, and the bringing of the news to remote countries, *countries which they had not known* (v. 9), people shall be much affected, and shall feel themselves sensibly touched by it. [1.] It shall fill them with vexation to see such an ancient, wealthy, potent kingdom thus humbled and brought down, and the pride of worldly glory, which they have such a value for, stained. *The hearts of many people* will be vexed to see the word of the God of Israel fulfilled in the destruction of Egypt, and that all the *gods of Egypt* were not able

to relieve it. Note, The destruction of some wicked people is a vexation to others. [2.] It shall fill them with admiration (v. 10): 'They shall be amazed at thee, shall wonder to see such great riches and power come to nothing, Rev. xviii. 17. Note, Those that admire with complacency the pomp of this world will admire with consternation the ruin of that pomp, which to those that know the vanity of all things here below is no surprise at all. [3.] It shall fill them with fear: even their kings (that think it their prerogative to be secure) shall be horribly afraid for thee, concluding their own house to be in danger when their neighbour's is on fire. *When I shall brandish my sword before them they shall tremble every man for his own life.* Note, When the sword of God's justice is drawn against some, to cut them off, it is thereby brandished before others, to give them warning. And those that will not be admonished by it, and made to reform, shall yet be frightened by it and made to tremble. They shall tremble at every moment, because of thy fall. When others are ruined by sin we have reason to quake for fear, as knowing ourselves guilty and obnoxious. *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?*

(3.) It is set forth by a plain and express prediction of the desolation itself that should come upon Egypt. [1.] The instruments of the desolation appear here very formidable. It is the sword of the king of Babylon, that warlike, that victorious prince, that shall come upon thee (v. 11), the swords of the mighty, even the terrible of the nations, all of them (v. 12), an army that there is no standing before. Note, Those that delight in war, and are upon all occasions entering into contention, may expect, some time or other, to be engaged with those that will prove too hard for them. Pharaoh had been forward to quarrel with his neighbour and to come forth with his rivers, with his armies, v. 2. But God will now give him enough of it. [2.] The instances of the desolation appear here very frightful, much the same with what we had before, ch. xxix. 10—12; xxx. 7. First, The multitude of Egypt shall be destroyed, not decimated, some picked out to be made examples, but all cut off. Note, The numbers of sinners, though they be a multitude, will neither secure them against God's power nor entitle them to his pity. Secondly, The pomp of Egypt shall be spoiled, the pomp of their court, what they have been proud of. Note, In renouncing the pomps of this world we did ourselves a great kindness, for they are things that are soon spoiled and that cheat their admirers. Thirdly, The cattle of Egypt, that used to feed by the rivers, shall be destroyed (v. 13), either cut off by the sword or carried off for a prey. Egypt was famous for horses, which would be an acceptable booty to the Chaldeans. The rivers shall be no more frequented as they have been by man and beast,

that came thither to drink. Fourthly, The waters of Egypt, that used to flow briskly, shall now grow deep, and slow, and heavy, and shall run like oil (v. 14), a figurative expression signifying that there should be such universal sadness and heaviness upon the whole nation that even the rivers should go softly and silently like mourners, and quite forget their rapid motion. Fifthly, The whole country of Egypt shall be stripped of its wealth; it shall be destitute of that whereof it was full (v. 15), corn, and cattle, and all the pleasant fruits of the earth; when those are smitten that dwell therein the ground is untilled, and that which is gathered becomes an easy prey to the invader. Note, God can soon empty those of this world's goods that have the greatest fulness of those things and are full of them, that enjoy most and have their hearts set upon those enjoyments. The Egyptians were full of their pleasant and plentiful country, and its rich productions. Every one that talked with them might perceive how much it filled them. But God can soon make their country destitute of that whereof it is full; it is therefore our wisdom to be full of treasures in heaven. When the country is made destitute, 1. It shall be an instruction to them: *Then shall they know that I am the Lord.* A sensible conviction of the vanity of the world, and the fading perishing nature of all things in it, will contribute much to our right knowledge of God as our portion and happiness. 2. It shall be a lamentation to all about them: *The daughters of the nations shall lament her* (v. 16), either because, being in alliance with her, they share in her grievances and suffer with her, or, being admirers of her, they at least share in her grief and sympathize with her. They shall lament for Egypt and all her multitude; it shall excite their pity to see so great a devastation made. By enlarging the matters of our joy we increase the occasions of our sorrow.

17 It came to pass also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 18 Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. 19 Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised. 20 They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her and all her multitudes. 21 The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are



gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword. 22 Asshur is there and all her company: his graves are about him: all of them slain, fallen by the sword: 23 Whose graves are set in the sides of the pit, and her company is round about her grave: all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which caused terror in the land of the living. 24 There is Elam and all her multitude round about her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, which are gone down uncircumcised into the nether parts of the earth, which caused their terror in the land of the living; yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit. 25 They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword: though their terror was caused in the land of the living, yet have they borne their shame with them that go down to the pit: he is put in the midst of *them that be slain*. 26 There is Meshech, Tubal, and all her multitude: her graves are round about him: all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, though they caused their terror in the land of the living. 27 And they shall not lie with the mighty *that are fallen* of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though *they were* the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. 28 Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shalt lie with *them that are slain* with the sword. 29 There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by *them that were slain* by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit. 30 There be the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians, which are gone down with the slain; with their terror they are ashamed of their might; and they lie uncircumcised with *them that be slain* by the sword,

and bear their shame with them that go down to the pit. 31 Pharaoh shall see them, and shall be comforted over all his multitude, *even* Pharaoh and all his army slain by the sword, saith the Lord God. 32 For I have caused my terror in the land of the living: and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with *them that are slain* with the sword, *even* Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord God.

This prophecy concludes and completes the burden of Egypt, and leaves it and all its multitude in the pit of destruction.

I. We are here invited to attend the funeral of that once flourishing kingdom, to lament its fall, and to take a view of those who attend it to the grave and accompany it in the grave.

1. This dead corpse of a kingdom is here brought to the grave. The prophet is ordered to *cast them down* to the pit (v. 18), to foretel their destruction as one that had authority, as Jeremiah was set over the kingdoms, Jer. i. 10. He must speak in God's name, and as from him who will cast them down. Yet he must foretel it as one that had an affectionate concern for them; he must *wail for the multitude of Egypt*, even when he *casts them down*. When Egypt is slain, let her have an honourable funeral, befitting her quality; let her be buried *with the daughters of the famous nations*, in their burying-places and with the same ceremony. It is but a poor allay to the reproach and terror of death to be buried with those that were famous; yet this is all that is allowed to Egypt. Shall Egypt think to exempt herself from the common fate of proud and imperious nations? No; she must take her lot with them (v. 19): "*Whom dost thou surpass in beauty? Art thou so much fairer than any other nation that thou shouldst expect therefore to be excused? No; others as fair as thou have sunk into the pit; go down therefore, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised*. Thou art like them and art likely to lie among them. The multitude of Egypt shall all *fall in the midst of those that are slain with the sword*, now that there is a general slaughter made among the nations." Egypt with the rest must drink of the bloody cup, and therefore she is *delivered to the sword*, to the sword of war (but, in God's hand, the sword of justice), is delivered to be publicly executed. *Draw her and all her multitude*; draw them either as the dead bodies of great men are drawn in honour to the grave, in a hearse, or as malefactors are drawn in disgrace to the place of execution, on a sledge; draw them to the pit, and let them be made a spectacle to the world.

2. This corpse of a kingdom is bid *we come* to the grave, and Pharaoh is made free

of the congregation of the dead, and admitted into their regions, not without some pomp and ceremony. As the surprising fall of the king of Babylon is thus illustrated, *Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming*, and to introduce thee into those mansions of darkness (Isa. xiv. 9, &c.), so here (v. 21), *They shall speak to him out of the midst of hell*, as it were congratulating his arrival and calling him to join with them in acknowledging that which neither he nor they would be brought to own when they were in their pomp and pride, that it is in vain to think of contesting with God, and none ever hardened their hearts against him and prospered. They shall say to him, and to those that pretended to help him, Where are you now? What have you brought your attempts to at last? Divers nations are here mentioned as gone down to the grave before Egypt that are ready to give her a scornful reception and upbraid her with coming to them at last. These nations here spoken of were probably such as had been of late years ruined and wasted by the king of Babylon, and their princes cut off; let Egypt know that she has *neighbour's fare*. When she goes to the grave she does but *migrare ad plures*—migrate to the majority; there are *innumerable before her*. But it is observable that though Judah and Jerusalem were just about this time, or a little before, utterly ruined and laid waste, yet they are not mentioned here among the nations that welcome Egypt to the pit; for though they suffered the same things that these nations suffered, and by the same hand, yet the kind intentions of their affliction, and its happy issue at last, and the mercy God had yet in reserve for them, altered the property of it; it was not to them a *going down to the pit*, as it was to the heathen; they were not *smitten as others were*, nor *slain according to the slaughter of other nations*, Isa. xxvii. 7. But let us see who those are that have *gone to the grave before Egypt*, that *lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword*, with whom she must now take up her lodging. (1.) There lie the Assyrian empire, and all the princes and mighty men of that monarchy (v. 22): *Asshur is there and all her company*, all the countries that were tributaries to and had dependence upon that crown. That mighty potentate who used to lie in state, with his guards and grantees about him, now lies in obscurity, with his *graves about him* and his soldiers in them, unable any longer to do him service or honour; they are *all of them slain, fallen by the sword*. The number of their months was *cut off in the midst*, and, being *bloody and deceitful men*, they were not suffered to *live out half their days*. Their *graves were set in the sides of the pit*, all in a row, like beds in a common chamber, v. 23. All their company is such as were *slain, fallen by the sword*; a vast congregation there is of such, who had *caused terror in the land of the liv-*

*ing*. But as the death of those to whom they were a terror put an end to their fears (in the grave *the prisoners rest together and hear not the voice of the oppressor*, Job iii. 18), so the death of these mighty men puts an end to their terrors. Who is afraid of a *dead lion*? Note, Death will be a king of terrors to those who, instead of making themselves blessings, make themselves terrors, in their generation. (2.) There lies the kingdom of Persia, which perhaps within the memory of man at that time had been wasted and brought down: *There is Elam and all her multitude*, the king of Elam and his numerous armies, v. 24, 25. They also had *caused their terror in the land of the living*, had made a fearful noise and bluster among the nations in their day. But Elam has now a grave by herself, and the graves of the common people *round about her, fallen by the sword*; she has *her bed in the midst of the slain* that went down *uncircumcised, unsanctified*, unholy, and not in covenant with God. They have *borne their shame with those that go down to the pit*; they have fallen under the common disgrace and mortification of mankind, that they die and are buried; nay, they die under particular marks of ignominy, which God and man put upon them. Note, Those who cause their terror shall, sooner or later, bear their *shame*, and be made a terror to themselves. The king of Elam is *put in the midst of those that are slain*. All the honour he can now pretend to is to be buried in the chief sepulchre. (3.) There lies the Scythian power, which, about this time, was busy in the world. *Meshech and Tubal*, those barbarous northern nations, had lately made a descent upon the Medes, and *caused their terror among them*, lived among them upon free quarter for some years, making every thing their own that they could lay their hands on; but at length Cyaxares, king of the Medes, drew them by a wile into his power, cut off abundance of them, and obliged them to quit his country, v. 26. There lie Meshech and Tubal, and all their multitude; there is a burying place for them, with their chief commander in the midst of them, *all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword*. These Scythians, dying ingloriously as they lived, are not laid, as the other nations spoken of before, in the bed of honour (v. 27): *They shall not lie with the mighty*, shall not be buried in state, as those are, even by consent of the enemy, that are slain in the field of battle, that *go down to their graves with their weapons of war* carried before the hearse, or trailed after it, that have particularly *their swords laid under their heads*, as if they could sleep the sweeter in the grave when they laid their heads on such a pillow. These Scythians are not buried with these marks of honour, but *their iniquities shall be upon their sons*; they shall, for their iniquity, be left unburied, though they were the *terror even of the mighty in the land of the living*.



(4.) There lies the kingdom of Edom, which had flourished long, but about this time, at least before the destruction of Egypt, was made quite desolate, as was foretold, *ch. xxv. 13.* Among the sepulchres of the nations *there is Edom, v. 29.* There lie, not dignified with monuments or inscriptions, but mingled with common dust, *her kings and all her princes, her wise statesmen (which Edom was famous for), and her brave soldiers. These with their might are laid by those that were slain by the sword;* their might could not prevent it, nay, their might helped to procure it, for that both encouraged them to engage in war and incensed their neighbours against them, who thought it necessary to curb their growing greatness. A great deal of pains they took to ruin themselves, as many do, who *with their might, with all their might, are laid by those that were slain with the sword.* The Edomites retained circumcision, being of the seed of Abraham. But that shall stand them in no stead; they shall *lie with the uncircumcised.* (5.) There lie the *princes of the north, and all the Zidonians.* These were as well acquainted with maritime affairs as the Egyptians were, who relied much upon that part of their strength, but they have *gone down with the slain (v. 30), down to the pit.* Now they are *ashamed of their might,* ashamed to think how much they boasted of it and trusted to it; and, as the *Edomites with their might,* so these *with their terror,* are laid with those that are *slain by the sword* and are forced to take their lot with them. *They bear their shame with those that go down to the pit,* die in as much disgrace as those that are cut off by the hand of public justice. (6.) All this is applied to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who have no reason to flatter themselves with hopes of tranquillity when they see how the wisest, and wealthiest, and strongest, of their neighbours have been laid waste (*v. 28*): "*Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised; when God is pulling down the unhumbled and unreformed nations thou must expect to come down with them.*" [1.] It will be some extenuation of the miseries of Egypt to observe that it has been the case of so many great and mighty nations before (*v. 31*): *Pharaoh shall see them and be comforted;* it will be some ease to his mind that he is not the first king that has been slain in battle—his not the first army that has been routed, his not the first kingdom that has been made desolate. Mr. Greenhill observes here, "The comfort which wicked ones have after death is poor comfort, not real, but imaginary." They will find little satisfaction in having so many fellow-sufferers; the rich man in hell dreaded it. It is only in point of honour that Pharaoh can *see and be comforted.* [2.] But nothing will be an exemption from these miseries; for (*v. 32*) *I have caused my terror in the land of the living.* Great men have caused their terror, have

studied how to make every body *fear them Oderint dum metuant—Let them hate, so that they do but fear.* But now the great God has *caused his terror in the land of the living;* and therefore he laughs at theirs, because he sees that *his day is coming, Ps. xxxvii. 13.* In this day of terror Pharaoh and all his multitude shall be *laid with those that are slain by the sword.*

II. The view which this prophecy gives us of ruined states may show us something, 1. Of this present world, and the empire of death in it. Come, and see the calamitous state of human life; see what a dying world this is. The strong die, the mighty die, Pharaoh and all his multitude. See what a killing world this is. They are all *slain with the sword.* As if men did not die fast enough of themselves, men are ingenious at finding out ways to destroy one another. It is not only a great pit, but a great cock-pit. 2. Of the other world. Though it is the destruction of nations as such that perhaps is principally intended here, yet here is a plain allusion to the final and everlasting ruin of impenitent sinners, of those that are uncircumcised in heart; they are *slain by the sword* of divine justice; their *iniquity is upon them,* and with it they *bear their shame.* Those, Christ's enemies, that would not have him to reign over them, *shall be brought forth and slain before him,* though they be as pompous, though they be as numerous, as Pharaoh and all his multitude.

## CHAP. XXXIII.

The prophet has now come off his circuit, which he went as Judge, in God's name, to try and pass sentence upon the neighbouring nations, and, having finished with them, and read them all their doom, in the eight chapters foregoing, he now returns to the children of his people, and receives further instructions what to say to them. I. He must let them know what office he was in among them as a prophet, that he was a watchman, and had received a charge concerning them, for which he was accountable, ver. 1—9. The substance of this we had before, *ch. iii. 17, &c.* II. He must let them know upon what terms they stand with God, that they are upon their trial, upon their good behaviour; that if a wicked man repent he shall not perish, but that if a righteous man spoliatize he shall perish, ver. 10—20. III. Here is a particular message sent to those who yet remained in the land of Israel, and (which is very strange) grew secure there, and confident that they should take root there again, to tell them that their hopes would fail them because they persisted in their sins, ver. 21—29. IV. Here is a rebuke to those who personally attended Ezekiel's ministry, but were not sincere in their professions of devotion, ver. 30—33.

AGAIN the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: 3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; 4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He



heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. 6 But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. 7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. 8 When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

The prophet had been, by express order from God, taken off from prophesying to the Jews, just then when the news came that Jerusalem was invested, and close siege laid to it, *ch. xxiv. 27*. But now that Jerusalem is taken, two years after, he is appointed again to direct his speech to them; and here his commission is renewed. If God had abandoned them quite, he would not have sent prophets to them; nor, if he had not had mercy in store for them, would he have *shown them such things as these*. In these verses we have,

I. The office of a watchman laid down, the trust reposed in him, the charge given him, and the conditions adjusted between him and those that employ him, *v. 2, 6*. 1. It is supposed to be a public danger that gives occasion for the appointing of a watchman—when *God brings the sword upon a land*, *v. 2*. The sword of war, whenever it comes upon a land, is of God's bringing; it is the *sword of the Lord*, of his justice, how unjustly soever men draw it. At such a time, when a country is in fear of a foreign invasion, that they may be informed of all the motions of the enemy, may not be surprised with an attack, but may have early notice of it, in order to their being at their arms and in readiness to give the invader a warm reception, they *set a man of their coast*, some likely person, that lives upon the borders of their country, where the threatened danger is expected, and is therefore well acquainted with all the avenues of it, and make him *their watchman*. Thus wise are the children

*of this world in their generation*. Note, One man may be of public service to a whole country. Princes and statesmen are the watchmen of a kingdom; they are continually to employ themselves, and, if occasion be, as watchmen, to expose themselves for the public safety. 2. It is supposed to be a public trust that is lodged in the watchman and that he is accountable to the public for the discharge of it. His business is, (1.) To discover the approaches and advances of the enemy; and therefore he must not be blind nor asleep, for then he cannot *see the sword coming*. (2.) To give notice of them immediately by sound of trumpet, or, as sentinels among us, by the discharge of a gun, as a signal of danger. A special trust and confidence is reposed in him by those that set him to be their watchman that he will faithfully do these two things; and they venture their lives upon his fidelity. Now, [1.] If he do his part, if he be betimes aware of all the dangers that fall within his cognizance, and give warning of them, he has discharged his trust, and has not only *delivered his soul*, but earned his wages. If the people do not take warning, if they either will not believe the notice he gives them, will not believe the danger to be so great or so near as really it is, or will not regard it, and so are surprised by the enemy in their security, it is their own fault; the blame is not to be laid upon the watchman, but their blood is upon their own head. If any person goes presumptuously into the mouth of danger, though he heard the sound of the trumpet, and was told by it where the danger was, and *so the sword comes and takes him away* in his folly, he is *felo de se—a suicide*; foolish man, he has *destroyed himself*. But, [2.] If the watchman do not do his duty, if he might have seen the danger, and did not, but was asleep, or heedless, or looking another way, or if he did *see the danger* (for so the case is put here) and shifted only for his own safety, and *blew not the trumpet to warn the people*, so that some are surprised and cut off *in their iniquity* (*v. 6*), cut off suddenly, without having time to cry, *Lord, have mercy upon me*, time to repent and make their peace with God (which makes the matter much the worse, that the poor creature is *taken away in his iniquity*), his blood shall be required *at the watchman's hand*; he shall be found guilty of his death, because he did not *give him warning* of his danger. But if the watchman do his part, and the people do theirs, all is well; both he that gives warning and he that takes warning have delivered their souls.

II. The application of this to the prophet, *v. 7, 9*.

1. He is a *watchman to the house of Israel*. He had occasionally given warning to the nations about, but to the house of Israel he was a watchman by office, for they were the *children of the prophets and the covenant*.



They did not set him for a watchman, as the people of the land, v. 2 (for they were not so wise for their souls as to secure the welfare of them, as they would have been for the protection of their temporal interests); but God did it for them; he appointed them a watchman.

2. His business as a watchman is to give warning to sinners of their misery and danger by reason of sin. This is the word he must hear from God's mouth and speak to them. (1.) God has said, *The wicked man shall surely die*; he shall be miserable. Unless he repent, he shall be cut off from God and all comfort and hope in him, shall be cut off from all good. He shall fall and lie for ever under the wrath of God, which is the death of the soul, as his favour is its life. The righteous God has said it, and will never unsay it, nor can all the world gainsay it, that the wages of sin is death. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, not only against wicked nations, speaking ruin to them as nations, but against wicked persons, speaking ruin to them in their personal capacity, their personal interests, which pass into the other world and last to eternity, as national interests do not. (2.) It is the will of God that the wicked man should be warned of this: *Warn them from me*. This intimates that there is a possibility of preventing it, else it were a jest to give warning of it; nay, and that God is desirous it should be prevented. Sinners are therefore warned of the wrath to come, that they may flee from it, Matt. iii. 7. (3.) It is the work of ministers to give him warning, to say to the wicked, *It shall be ill with thee*, Isa. iii. 11. God says in general, *The soul that sinneth it shall die*. The minister's business is to apply this to particular persons, and to say, "*O wicked man! thou shalt surely die*, whoever thou art; if thou go on still in thy trespasses, they will inevitably be thy ruin. O adulterer! O robber! O drunkard! O swearer! O sabbath-breaker! *thou shalt surely die*." And he must say this, not in passion, to provoke the sinner, but in compassion, to warn the wicked from his way, warn him to turn from it, that he may live. This is to be done by the faithful preaching of the word in public, and by personal application to those whose sins are open.

3. If souls perish through his neglect of his duty, he brings guilt upon himself. "If the prophet do not warn the wicked of the ruin that is at the end of his wicked way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; for, though the watchman did not do his part, yet the sinner might have taken warning from the written word, from his own conscience, and from God's judgments upon others, by which his mouth shall be stopped, and God will be justified in his destruction." Note, It will not serve impenitent sinners to plead in the great day that their watchmen

did not give them warning, that they were careless and unfaithful; for, though they were so, it will be made to appear that God left not himself without witness. "But he shall not perish alone in his iniquity: the watchman also shall be called to an account: *His blood will I require at thy hand*. The blind leader shall fall with the blind follower into the ditch." See what a desire God has of the salvation of sinners, in that he resents it so ill if those concerned do not what they can to prevent their destruction. And see what a great deal those ministers have to answer for another day who palliate sin, and flatter sinners in their evil way, and by their wicked lives countenance and harden them in their wickedness, and encourage them to believe that they shall have peace though they go on.

4. If he do his duty, he may take the comfort of it, though he do not see the success of it (v. 9): "*If thou warn the wicked of his way*, if thou tell him faithfully what will be the end thereof, and call him earnestly to turn from it, and he do not turn, but persist in it, *he shall die in his iniquity*, and the fair warning given him will be an aggravation of his sin and ruin; but *thou hast delivered thy soul*." Note, It is a comfort to ministers that they may through grace save themselves, though they cannot be instrumental to save so many as they wish of those that hear them.

10 Therefore, O thou son of man speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? 12 Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. 13 When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. 14 Again, when I say

unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right ; 15 *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity ; he shall surely live, he shall not die. 16 None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him : he hath done that which is lawful and right ; he shall surely live. 17 Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal : but as for them, their way is not equal. 18 When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. 19 But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. 20 Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.

These verses are the substance of what we had before (*ch. xviii. 20, &c.*), and they are so full and express a declaration of the terms on which people stand with God (as the former were of the terms on which ministers stand), that it is no wonder that they are here repeated, as those were, though we had the substance of them before. Observe here,

I. The cavils of the people against God's proceedings with them. God was now in his providence contending with them, but their uncircumcised hearts were not as yet humbled, for they were industrious to justify themselves, though thereby they reflected on God. Two things they insisted upon, in their reproaches of God, and in both they added iniquity to their sin, and misery to their punishment :—1. They quarrelled with his promises and favours, as having no kindness nor sincerity in them, *v. 10*. God had set life before them, but they plead that he had set it out of their reach, and therefore did but mock them with the mention of it. The prophet had said, some time ago (*ch. xxiv. 23*), *You shall pine away for your iniquities* ; with that word he had concluded his threatenings against Judah and Jerusalem ; and this they now upbraided him with, as if it had been spoken absolutely, to drive them to despair ; whereas it was spoken conditionally, to bring them to repentance. Thus are the sayings of God's ministers perverted by men of corrupt minds, who are inclined to pick quarrels. He puts them in hopes of life and happiness ; and herein they would make him contradict himself ;

“for” (say they) “*if our transgressions and our sins be upon us*, as thou hast often told us they are, and if we must, as thou sayest, *pine away in them*, and wear out a miserable captivity in a fruitless repentance, *how shall we then live* ? If this be our doom, there is no remedy. *We die, we perish, we all perish.*” Note, It is very common for those that have been hardened with presumption when they were warned against sin to sink into despair when they are called to repent, and to conclude there is no hope of life for them. 2. They quarrelled with his threatenings and judgments, as having no justice or equity in them. They said, *The way of the Lord is not equal* (*v. xvii. 20*), suggesting that God was partial in his proceedings, that with him there was respect of persons, and that he was more severe against sin and sinners than there was cause.

II. Here is a satisfactory answer given to both these cavils.

1. Those that despaired of finding mercy with God are here answered with a solemn declaration of God's readiness to show mercy, *v. 11*. When they spoke of *pining away in their iniquity*, God sent the prophet to them, with all speed, to tell them that though their case was sad, it was not desperate, but there was yet *hope in Israel*. (1.) It is certain that God has no delight in the ruin of sinners, nor does he desire it. If they will destroy themselves, he will glorify himself in it, but he has no pleasure in it, but would rather they should *turn and live*, for his goodness is that attribute of his which is most his glory, which is most his delight. He would rather sinners should turn and live than go on and die. He has said it, he has sworn it, that by these two immutable things, in both which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation. We have his word and his oath ; and, since he could *swear by no greater, he swears by himself : As I live*. They questioned whether they should *live*, though they did repent and reform ; yea, says God, as sure *as I live*, true penitents shall live also ; for *their life is hid with Christ in God*. (2.) It is certain that God is sincere and in earnest in the calls he gives sinners to repent : *Turn you, turn you, from your evil way*. To repent is to turn from our evil way ; this God requires sinners to do ; this he urges them to do by repeated pressing instances : *Turn you, turn you*. O that they would be prevailed with to turn, to turn quickly, without delay ! This he will enable them to do if they will but *frame their doings to turn to the Lord*, *Hos. v. 4*. For he has said, *I will pour out my Spirit unto you*, *Prov. i. 23*. And in this he will accept of them ; for it is not only what he commands, but what he courts them to. (3.) It is certain that, if sinners perish in their impenitency, it is owing to themselves ; they die because they will die ; and herein they act most absurdly and unreasonably : *Why*



*will you die, O house of Israel?* God would have heard them, and they would not be heard.

2. Those that despaired of finding justice with God are here answered with a solemn declaration of the rule of judgment which God would go by in dealing with the children of men, which carries along with it the evidence of its own equity; he that runs may read the justice of it. The Jewish nation, as a nation, was now *dead*; it was ruined to all intents and purposes. The prophet must therefore deal with particular persons, and the rule of judgment concerning them is much like that concerning a nation, Jer. xviii. 7—10. If God speak concerning it to build and to plant, and it do wickedly, he will recal his favours and leave it to ruin. But if he speak concerning it to pluck up and destroy, and it repent, he will revoke the sentence and deliver it. So it is here. In short, The most plausible professors, if they apostatize, shall certainly perish for ever in their apostasy from God; and the most notorious sinners, if they repent, shall certainly be happy for ever in their return to God. This is here repeated again and again, because it ought to be again and again considered, and preached over to our own hearts. This was necessary to be inculcated upon this stupid senseless people, that said, *The way of the Lord is not equal*; for these rules of judgment are so plainly just that they need no other confirmation of them than the repetition of them.

(1.) If those that have made a great profession of religion throw off their profession, quit the good ways of God and grow loose and carnal, sensual and worldly, the profession they made and all the religious performances with which they had for a great while kept up the credit of their profession shall stand them in no stead, but they shall certainly perish in their iniquity, v. 12, 13, 18. [1.] God says to the *righteous man* that *he shall surely live*, v. 13. He says it by his word, by his ministers. He that lives regularly, his own heart tells him, his neighbours tell him, He shall live. Surely such a man as this cannot but be happy. And it is certain, if he proceed and persevere in his righteousness, and if, in order to that, he be upright and sincere in it, if he be really as good as he seems to be, he shall live; he shall continue in the love of God and be for ever happy in that love. [2.] Righteous men, who have very good hopes of themselves and whom others have a very good opinion of, are yet in danger of turning to iniquity by trusting to their righteousness. So the case is put here: *If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity*, and come to make a trade of sin—if he not only take a false step, but turn aside into a false way and persist in it. This may possibly be the case of a righteous man, and it is the effect of his trusting to his own righteousness. Note, Many eminent professors have been ruined

by a proud conceitedness of themselves and confidence in themselves. He trusts to the merit of his own righteousness, and thinks he has already made God so much his debtor that now he may venture to commit iniquity, for he has righteousness enough in stock to make amends for it; he fancies that whatever evil deeds he may do hereafter he can be in no danger from them, having so many good deeds beforehand to counterbalance them. Or, He trusts to the strength of his own righteousness, thinks himself now so well established in a course of virtue that he may thrust himself into any temptation and it cannot overcome him, and so by presuming on his own sufficiency he is brought to commit iniquity. By making bold on the confines of sin he is drawn at length into the depths of hell. This ruined the Pharisees; they *trusted to themselves that they were righteous*, and that their long prayers, and fasting twice in the week, would atone for their devouring widows' houses. [3.] If righteous men *turn to iniquity*, and return not to their righteousness, they shall certainly perish in their iniquity, and all the righteousness they have formerly done, all their prayers, and all their alms, shall be forgotten. No mention shall be made, no remembrance had, of their good deeds; they shall be overlooked, as if they had never been. *The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him from the wrath of God, and the curse of the law, in the day of his transgression.* When he becomes a traitor and a rebel, and takes up arms against his rightful Sovereign, it will not serve for him to plead in his own defence that formerly he was a loyal subject, and did many good services to the government. No; *he shall not be able to live.* The remembrance of his former righteousness shall be no satisfaction either to God's justice or his own conscience *in the day that he sins*, but rather shall, in the estimate of both, highly aggravate the sin and folly of his apostasy. And therefore *for his iniquity that he committed he shall die*, v. 13. And again (v. 18), *He shall even die thereby*; and it is owing to himself.

(2.) If those that have lived a wicked life repent and reform, forsake their wicked ways and become religious, their sins shall be pardoned, and they shall be justified and saved, if they persevere in their reformation. [1.] God says to the wicked, *"Thou shalt surely die."* The way that thou art in leads to destruction. The wages of thy sin is death, and thy iniquity will shortly be thy ruin." It was said to the righteous man, *Thou shalt surely live*, for his encouragement to proceed and persevere in the way of righteousness; but he made an ill use of it, and was emboldened by it to commit iniquity. It was said to the wicked man, *Thou shalt surely die*, for warning to him not to persist in his wicked ways; and he makes a good use of it, and is quickened thereby to return to God and duty. Thus even the threatenings of



the word are to some, by the grace of God, a savour of life unto life, while even the promises of the word become to others, by their own corruption, a savour of death unto death. When God says to the wicked man, *Thou shalt surely die*, die eternally, it is to frighten him, not out of his wits, but out of his sins. [2.] There is many a wicked man who was hastening apace to his own destruction who yet is wrought upon by the grace of God to return and repent, and live a holy life. He *turns from his sin* (v. 14), and is resolved that he will have no more to do with it; and, as an evidence of his repentance for wrong done, he *restores the pledge* (v. 15) which he had taken uncharitably from the poor, *he gives again that which he had robbed and taken unjustly from the rich*. Nor does he only *cease to do evil*, but he *learns to do well*; he does that which is *lawful and right*, and makes conscience of his duty both to God and man—a great change, since, awhile ago, he neither feared God nor regarded man. But many such amazing changes, and blessed ones, have been wrought by the power of divine grace. He that was going on in the paths of death and the destroyer now walks in the *statutes of life*, in the way of God's commandments, which has both life in it (Prov. xii. 28) and life at the end of it, Matt. xix. 17. And in this good way he perseveres *without committing iniquity*, though not free from remaining infirmity, yet under the dominion of no iniquity. He repents not of his repentance, nor returns to the commission of those gross sins which he before allowed himself in. [3.] He that does thus repent and return shall escape the ruin he was running into, and his former sins shall be no prejudice to his acceptance with God. Let him not pine away in his iniquity, for, if he confess and forsake it, he shall find mercy. He *shall surely live*; he *shall not die*, v. 15. Again (v. 16), *He shall surely live*. Again (v. 19), *He has done that which is lawful and right, and he shall live thereby*. But will not his wickednesses be remembered against him? No; he shall not be punished for them (v. 12): *As for the wickedness of the wicked*, though it was very heinous, yet he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness. Now that it has become his grief it shall not be his ruin. Now that there is a settled separation between him and sin there shall be no longer a separation between him and God. Nay, he shall not be so much as upbraided with them (v. 16): *None of his sins that he has committed shall be mentioned unto him*, either as a clog to his pardon or an allay to the comfort of it, or as any blemish and diminution to the glory that is prepared for him.

Now lay all this together, and then judge whether the way of the Lord be not equal, whether this will not justify God in the destruction of sinners and glorify him in the

salvation of penitents. The conclusion of the whole matter is (v. 20): "*O you house of Israel*, though you are all involved now in the common calamity, yet there shall be a distinction of persons made in the spiritual and eternal state, and *I will judge you every one after his ways*." Though they were sent into captivity by the lump, good fish and bad enclosed in the same net, yet there he will separate between the precious and the vile and will *render to every man according to his works*. Therefore God's way is equal and unexceptionable; but, as for the *children of thy people*, God turns them over to the prophet, as he did to Moses (Exod. xxxii. 7): "They are thy people; I can scarcely own them for mine." As for them, *their way is unequal*; this way which they have got of quarrelling with God and his prophets is absurd and unreasonable. In all disputes between God and his creatures it will certainly be found that he is in the right and they are in the wrong.

21 And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten. 22 Now the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening, afore he that was escaped came; and had opened my mouth, until he came to me in the morning; and my mouth was opened, and I was no more dumb. 23 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 24 Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance. 25 Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land? 26 Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land? 27 Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. 28 For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the moun-



tains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through. 29 Then shall they know that I am the Lord, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

Here we have,

I. The tidings brought to Ezekiel of the burning of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. The city was burnt in the eleventh year of the captivity and the fifth month. Jer. lii. 12, 13. Tidings hereof were brought to the prophet by one that was an eye-witness of the destruction, in the twelfth year, and the tenth month (v. 21), which was a year and almost five months after the thing was done; we may well suppose that, there being a constant correspondence at this time more than ever kept up between Jerusalem and Babylon, he had heard the news long before. But this was the first time he had an account of it from a refugee, from one who escaped, who could be particular, and would be pathetic, in the narrative of it. And the sign given him was the coming of such a one to him as had himself narrowly escaped the flames (ch. xxiv. 26): *He that escapes in that day shall come unto thee, to cause thee to hear it with thy ears*, to hear it more distinctly than ever, from one that could say, *Quæque ipse miserrima vidi—These miserable scenes I saw*.

II. The divine impressions and influences he was under, to prepare him for those heavy tidings (v. 22): *The hand of the Lord was upon me before he came, and had opened my mouth to speak to the house of Israel what we had in the former part of this chapter. And now he was no more dumb*; he prophesied now with more freedom and boldness, being by the event proved a true prophet, to the confusion of those that contradicted him. All the prophecies from ch. xxiv. to this chapter having relation purely to the nations about, it is probable that the prophet, when he received them from the Lord, did not deliver them by word of mouth, but in writing; for he could not *Say to the Ammonites, Say unto Tyrus, Say unto Pharaoh, &c.*, so and so, but by letters directed to the persons concerned, as Zacharias, when he could not speak, wrote; and herein he was as truly executing his prophetic office as ever. Note, Even silenced ministers may be doing a great deal of good by writing letters and making visits. But now the prophet's mouth is opened, that he may *speak to the children of his people*. It is probable that he had, during these three years, been continually speaking to them as a friend, putting them in mind of what he had formerly delivered to them, but that he never spoke to them as a prophet, by inspiration, till now, when *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, renewed his commission, gave him

fresh instructions, and opened his mouth, furnished him with power to speak to the people *as he ought to speak*.

III. The particular message he was entrusted with, relating to these Jews that yet remained in the *land of Israel*, and *inhabited the wastes* of that land, v. 24. See what work sin had made. *The cities of Israel* had now become the wastes of Israel, for they lay all in ruins; some few that had escaped the sword and captivity still continued there and began to think of re-settling. This was so long after the destruction of Jerusalem, that it was some time before this that Gedaliah (a modest humble man) and his friends were slain; but probably at this time Johanan, and the *proud men* that joined with him, were at the height (Jer. xliii. 2); and before they came to a resolution to go into Egypt, wherein Jeremiah opposed them, it is probable that the project was to establish themselves in the wastes of the land of Israel, in which Ezekiel here opposed them, and probably despatched the message away by the person that brought him the news of Jerusalem's destruction. Or, perhaps, those here prophesied against might be some other party of Jews, that remained in the land, hoping to take root there and to be sole masters of it, after Johanan and his forces had gone into Egypt. Now here we have,

1. An account of the pride of these remaining Jews, who dwelt in the *wastes of the land of Israel*. Though the providence of God concerning them had been very humbling, and still was very threatening, yet they were intolerably haughty and secure, and promised themselves peace. He that brought the news to the prophet that Jerusalem was smitten could not tell him (it is likely) what these people said, but God tells him, *They say, "The land is given us for inheritance"*, v. 24. Our partners being gone, it is now all our own by survivorship, or, for want of heirs, it comes to us as occupants; we shall now be placed alone in the midst of the earth and have it all to ourselves." This argues great stupidity under the weighty hand of God, and a reigning selfishness and narrow-spiritedness; they pleased themselves in the ruin of their country as long as they hoped to find their own account in it, cared not though it were *all waste*, so that they might have the sole property—a poor inheritance to be proud of! They have the impudence to compare their case with Abraham's, glorying in this, *We have Abraham to our father*. "Abraham," say they, "*was one, one family, and he inherited the land, and lived many years in the peaceable enjoyment of it; but we are many, many families, more numerous than he; the land is given us for inheritance*." (1.) They think they can make out as good a title from God to this land as Abraham could: "If God *gave this land* to him, who was but one worshipper of him, as a reward of his service,

much more will he give it to us, who are many worshippers of him, as the reward of our service." This shows the great conceit they had of their own merits, as if they were greater than those of Abraham their father, who yet was not justified by works. (2.) They think they can make good the possession of this land against the Chaldeans and all other invaders, as well as Abraham could against those that were competitors with him for it: "If he, who was but one, could hold it, much more shall we, who are many, and have many more at command than his 300 trained servants." This shows the confidence they had in their own might; they had got possession, and were resolved to keep it.

2. A check to this pride. Since God's providences did neither humble them nor terrify them, he sends them a message sufficient to do both.

(1.) To humble them, he tells them of the wickedness they still persisted in, which rendered them utterly unworthy to possess this land, so that they could not expect God should give it to them. They had been followed with one judgment after another, but they had not profited by those means of grace as might be expected; they were still unreformed, and how could they expect that they should possess the land? "Shall you possess the land? What! such wicked people as you are? How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land? Jer. iii. 19. Surely you never reflect upon yourselves, else you would rather wonder that you are in the land of the living than expect to possess this land. For do you not know how bad you are?" [1.] "You make no conscience of forbidden fruit, forbidden food: *You eat with the blood,*" directly contrary to one of the precepts given to Noah and his sons when God gave them possession of the earth, Gen. ix. 4. [2.] "Idolatry, that covenant-breaking sin, that sin which the jealous God has been in a particular manner provoked by to lay your country waste, is still the sin that most easily besets you and which you have a strong inclination to: *You lift up your eyes towards your idols,* which is a sign that though perhaps you do not bow your knee to them so much as you have done, yet you set your hearts upon them and hanker after them." [3.] "You are as fierce, and cruel, and barbarous as ever: *You shed blood, innocent blood.*" [4.] "You confide in your own strength, your own arm, your own bow, and have no dependence on, or regard to, God and his providence: *You stand upon your sword* (v. 26); you think to carry all before you, and make all your own, by force of arms." How can those expect the inheritance of Isaac (as these did) who are of Ishmael's disposition, that had his hand against every man (Gen. xvi. 12), and Esau's resolution to live by his sword? Gen. xxvii. 40. We met with those (ch. xxxii. 27) who,

when they died, thought they could not lie easy underground unless they had their swords under their heads. Here we meet with those who, while they live, think they cannot stand firmly above ground unless they have their swords under their feet, as if swords were both the softest pillows and the strongest pillars; though it was sin, it was sin, that first drew the sword. But, blessed be God, there are those who know better, who stand upon the support of the divine power and promise and lay their heads in the bosom of divine love, *not trusting in their own sword*, Ps. xlv. 3. [5.] "You are guilty of all manner of abominations, and, particularly, *you defile every one his neighbour's wife*, which is an abomination of the first magnitude, *and shall you possess the land?* What! such vile miscreants as you?" Note, Those cannot expect to possess the land, nor to enjoy any true comfort or happiness here or hereafter, who live in rebellion against the Lord.

(2.) To terrify them, he tells them of the further judgments God had in store for them, which should make them utterly unable to possess this land, so that they could not stand it out against the enemy. Do they say that they shall possess the land? God has said they shall not, he has sworn it, *As I live, saith the Lord*. Though he has sworn that he delights not in the death of sinners, yet he has sworn also that those who persist in impenitency and unbelief shall not enter into his rest. [1.] Those that are in the cities, here called the wastes, shall fall by the sword, either by the sword of the Chaldeans, who come to avenge the murder of Gedaliah, or by one another's swords, in their intestine broils. [2.] Those that are in the open field shall be devoured by wild beasts, which swarmed, of course, in the country when it was dispeopled, and there were none to master them and keep them under, Exod. xxiii. 29. When the army of the enemy had quitted the country still there was no safety in it. Noisome beasts constituted one of the four sore judgments, ch. xiv. 15. [3.] Those that are in the forts and in the caves, that think themselves safe in artificial or natural fastnesses, because men's eyes cannot discover them nor men's darts reach them, there the arrows of the Almighty shall find them out; they shall die of the pestilence. [4.] The whole land, even the land of Israel, that had been the glory of all lands, shall be most desolate, v. 28. *It shall be desolation, desolation*, all over as desolate as desolation itself can make it. The mountain of Israel, the fruitful mountains, Zion itself the holy mountain not excepted, shall be desolate, the roads unfrequented, the houses uninhabited, that none shall pass through; as it was threatened (Deut. xxviii. 62), *You shall be left few in number*. [5.] The pomp of her strength, whatever she glories in as her pomp and trusts to as her strength, shall be made to cease. [6.] There



cause of all this was very bad; it is for all *their abominations which they have committed*. It is sin that does all this mischief, that makes nations desolate; and therefore we ought to call it an abomination. [7.] Yet the effect of all this will be very good: *Then shall they know that I am the Lord*, am their Lord, and shall return to their allegiance, *when I have made the land most desolate*. Those are untractable unteachable indeed that are not made to know their dependence upon God when all their creature-comforts fail them and are made desolate.

30 Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. 31 And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee *as my people*, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, *but their heart goeth after their covetousness*. 32 And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. 33 And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

The foregoing verses spoke conviction to the Jews who remained in the land of Israel, who were monuments of sparing mercy and yet returned not to the Lord; in these verses those are reproved who were now in captivity in Babylon, under divine rebukes, and yet were not reformed by them. They are not indeed charged with the same gross enormities that the others are charged with. They made some show of religion and devotion; but their hearts were not right with God. The thing they are here accused of is *mocking the messengers of the Lord*, one of their measure-filling sins, which brought this ruin upon them, and yet they were not cured of it. Two ways they mocked the prophet Ezekiel:—

I. By invidious ill-natured reflections upon him, privately among themselves, endeavouring by all means possible to render him despicable. The prophet did not know it, but charitably thought that those who spoke so well to him to his face, with so much seeming respect and deference, would surely not speak ill of him behind his back. But God comes and tells him, *The children of thy people are still talking against thee* (v.

30), or *talking of thee*, no good, I doubt. Note, Public persons are a common theme or subject of discourse; every one takes a liberty to censure them at pleasure. Faithful ministers know not how much ill is said of them every day; it is well that they do not; for, if they did, it might prove a discouragement to them in their work not to be easily got over. But God takes notice of all that is said against his ministers, not only what is decreed against them, or sworn against them, not only what is written against them, or spoken with solemnity and deliberation, but of what is said against them in common talk, among neighbours when they meet in an evening, *by the walls and in the doors of their houses*, where whatever freedom of speech they use, if they reproach and slander any of God's ministers, God will reckon with them for it; his prophets shall not be made the song of the drunkards always. They had no crime to lay to the prophet's charge, but they loved to talk of him in a careless, scornful, bantering way; they said, jokingly, "*Come, and let us hear what is the word that comes forth from the Lord*;" perhaps it will be something new, and will entertain us, and furnish us with matter for discourse." Note, Those have arrived at a great pitch of profaneness who can make so great a privilege, and so great a duty, as the preaching and hearing of the word of God, a matter of sport and ridicule, yea though it be not done publicly, but in private conversation among themselves. Serious things should be spoken seriously.

II. By dissembling with him in their attendance upon his ministry. Hypocrites mock God and mock his prophets. But their hypocrisy is open before God, and the day is coming when, as here, it will be laid open. Observe here,

1. The plausible profession which these people made and the speciousness of their pretensions. They are like those (Matt. xv. 8) who *draw nigh to God with their mouths and honour him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him*. (1.) They were diligent and constant in their attendance upon the means of grace: *They come unto thee as the people come*. In Babylon they had no temple or synagogue, but they went to the prophet's house (ch. viii. 1), and there, it is probable, they spent their *new moons and their sabbaths* in religious exercises, 2 Kings iv. 23. When the prophet was bound the word of the Lord was not bound; and the people, when they had not the help for their souls that they wished for, were thankful for what they had; it was a reviving in their bondage. Now these hypocrites came, *according to the coming of the people*, as duly and as early as any of the prophet's hearers. Their being said to come *as the people came* seems to intimate that the reason why they came was because other people came; they did not come out of conscience towards God

but only for company, for fashion-sake, and because it was now the custom of their countrymen. Note, Those that have no inward principle of love to God's ordinances may yet be found much in the external observance of them. Cain brought his sacrifice as well as Abel; and the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray as well as the publican. (2.) They behaved themselves very decently and reverently in the public assembly; there were none of them whispering, or laughing, or gazing about them, or sleeping. But *they sit before thee as my people*, with all the shows of gravity, and serenity, and composure of mind. They sit out the time, without weariness, or wishing the sermon done. (3.) They were very attentive to the word preached: "They are not thinking of something else, but they *hear thy words*, and take notice of what thou sayest." (4.) They pretended to have a great kindness and respect for the prophet. Though, behind his back, they could not give him a good word, yet, to his face, *they showed much love* to him and his doctrine; they pretended to have a great concern lest he should spend himself too much in preaching or expose himself to the Chaldeans, for they would be thought to be some of his best friends and well-wishers. (5.) They took a great deal of pleasure in the word; they *delighted to know God's word*, Isa. lviii. 2. *Herod heard John Baptist gladly*, Mark vi. 20. *Thou art unto them as a very lovely song*. Ezekiel's matter was surprising, his language fine, his expressions elegant, his similitudes apt, his voice melodious, and his delivery graceful; so that they could sit with as much pleasure to hear him preach as (if I may speak in the language of our times) to see a play or an opera, or to hear a concert of music. Ezekiel was to them as one *that had a pleasant voice* and could sing well, or *play well on an instrument*. Note, Men may have their fancies pleased by the word, and yet not have their consciences touched nor their hearts changed, the itching ear gratified and yet not the corrupt nature sanctified.

2. The hypocrisy of these professions and pretensions; it is all a sham, it is all a jest. (1.) They have no cordial affection for the word of God. While they *show much love* it is only with the *mouth*, from the teeth outward, but *their heart goes after their covetousness*; they are as much set upon the world as ever, as much in love and league with it as ever. Hearing the word is only their diversion and recreation, a pretty amusement now and then for an hour or two. But still their main business is with their farm and merchandise; the bent and bias of their souls are towards them, and their *inward thoughts* are employed in projects about them. Note, Covetousness is the ruining sin of multitudes that make a great profession of religion; it is the love of

the world that secretly eats the love of God out of their hearts. *The cares* of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are the *thorns* that *choke the seed*, and choke the soul too. And those neither please God nor profit themselves who, when they are hearing the word of God, are musing upon their worldly affairs. God has his eye on the hearts that do so. (2.) They yield no subjection to it. They *hear thy words*, but it is only a hearing that they *give thee*, for they *will not do them*, v. 31. And again (v. 32), they *do them not*. They will not be persuaded by all the prophet can say, either by authority or argument, to cross themselves in any instance, to part with any one beloved sin, or apply themselves to any one duty that is against the grain to flesh and blood. Note, There are many who take pleasure in hearing the word, but make no conscience of doing it; and so they build upon the sand, and deceive themselves.

3. Let us see what will be in the end hereof: *Shall their unbelief and carelessness make the word of God of no effect?* By no means. (1.) God will confirm the prophet's word, though they contemn it, and make light of it, v. 33. What he says will come to pass, and not one jot or one tittle shall fall to the ground. Note, The curses of the law, though they may be bantered by profane wits, cannot be baffled. (2.) They themselves shall rue their folly when it is too late. When it comes to pass *they shall know*, shall know to their cost, know to their confusion, that *a prophet has been among them*, though they made no more of him than as one that *had a pleasant voice*. Note, Those who will not consider that a prophet is among them, and who improve not the day of their visitation while it is continued, will be made to remember that a prophet has been among them when the things that belong to their peace are *hidden from their eyes*. The day is coming when vain and worldly men will have other thoughts of things than now they have, and will feel a weight in that which they made light of. They shall know that *a prophet has been among them* when they see the event exactly answer the prediction, and the prophet himself shall be a witness against them that they had fair warning given them, but would not take it. When Ezekiel is gone, whom now they speak against, and *there is no more any prophet*, nor any to *show them how long*, then they will remember that once they had a prophet, but knew not how to use him well. Note, Those who will not know the worth of mercies by the improvement of them will justly be made to know the worth of them by the want of them, as those who should desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, which now they slighted, and might not see it.

CHAP. XXXIV.

*The iniquities and calamities of God's Israel had been largely and*



pathetically lamented before, in this book. Now in this chapter the shepherds of Israel, their rulers both in church and state, are called to an account, as having been very much accessory to the sin and ruin of Israel, by their neglecting to do the duty of their place. Here is, I. A high charge exhibited against them for their negligence, their unskillfulness, and unfaithfulness in the management of public affairs, ver. 1—6 and again ver. 8. II. Their discharge from their trust, for their insufficiency and treachery, ver. 7—10. III. A gracious promise that God would take care of his flock, though they did not, and that it should not always suffer as it had done by their mal-administrations, ver. 11—16. IV. Another charge exhibited against those of the flock that were fat and strong, for the injuries they did to those that were weak and feeble, ver. 17—22. V. Another promise that God would in the fulness of time send the Messiah, to be the great and good Shepherd of the sheep, who should redress all grievances and set every thing to rights with the flock, ver. 23—31.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. 4 The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. 5 And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

The prophecy of this chapter is not dated, nor any of those that follow it, till chap. xl. It is most probable that it was delivered after the completing of Jerusalem's destruction, when it would be very seasonable to enquire into the causes of it.

I. The prophet is ordered to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel—the princes and magistrates, the priests and Levites, the great Sanhedrim or council of state, or whoever they were that had the direction of public affairs in a higher or lower sphere, the kings especially, for there were two of them now captives in Babylon, who, as well as the people, must have their transgressions shown them, that they might repent, as Manasseh in his captivity. God has something to say to the shepherds, for they are but under-shepherds, accountable to him who is the great Shepherd of Israel, Ps. lxxx. 1. And that which he says is, Woe to the shepherds of Israel! Though they are shepherds and

shepherds of Israel, yet he must not spare them, must not flatter them. Note, If men's dignity and power do not, as they ought, keep them from sin, they will not serve to exempt them from reproof, to excuse their repentance, or to secure them from the judgments of God if they do not repent. We had a woe to the pastors, Jer. xxiii. 1. God will in a particular manner reckon with them if they be false to their trust.

II. He is here directed what to charge the shepherds with, in God's name, as the ground of God's controversy with them; for it is not a causeless quarrel. Two things they are charged with:—1. That all their care was to advance and enrich themselves and to make themselves great. Their business was to take care of those that were committed to their charge: *Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?* No doubt they should; they betray their trust if they do not. Not that they are to put the meat into their mouths, but to provide it for them and bring them to it. But these shepherds made this the least of their care; they fed themselves, contrived every thing to gratify and indulge their own appetite, and to make themselves rich and great, fat and easy. They made sure of the profits of their places; they did eat the fat, the cream (so some), for he that feeds a flock eats of the milk of it (1 Cor. ix. 7), and they made sure of the best of the milk. They made sure of the fleece, and clothed themselves with the wool, getting into their hands as much as they could of the estates of their subjects, yea, and killed those that were well fed, that what they had might be fed upon, as Naboth was put to death for his vineyard. Note, There is a woe to those who are in public trusts, but consult only their own private interest, and are more inquisitive about the benefice than about the office, what money is to be got than what good to be done. It is an old complaint, *All seek their own*, and too many more than their own. 2. That they took no care for the benefit and welfare of those that were committed to their charge: *You feed not the flock.* They neither knew how to do it, so ignorant were they, nor would they take any pains to do it, so lazy and slothful were they; nay, they never desired nor designed it, so treacherous and unfaithful were they. (1.) They did not do their duty to those of the flock that were distempered, did not strengthen them, nor heal them, nor bind them up, v. 4. When any of the flock were sick or hurt, worried or wounded, it was all one to them whether they lived or died; they never looked after them. The princes and judges took no care to right those that suffered wrong or to shelter injured innocency. They took no care of the poor to see them provided for; they might starve, for them. The priests took no care to instruct the ignorant, to rectify the mistakes of those that were in error, to warn

the unruly, or to comfort the feeble-minded. The ministers of state took no care to check the growing distempers of the kingdom, which threatened the vitals of it. Things were amiss, and out of course, every where, and nothing was done to rectify them. (2.) They did not do their duty to those of the flock that were dispersed, that were driven away by the enemies that invaded the country, and were forced to seek for shelter where they could find a place, or that *wandered* of choice upon *the mountains and hills* (v. 6), where they were exposed to the beasts of prey and became *meat to them*, v. 5. Every one is ready to seize a waif and stray. Some went abroad and begged, some went abroad and traded, and thus the country became thin of inhabitants, and was weakened and impoverished, and wanted hands both in the fields of corn and in the fields of battle, both in harvest and in war: *My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth*, v. 6. And they were never enquired after, were never encouraged to return to their own country: *None did search or seek after them*. Nay, *with force and cruelty they ruled them*, which drove more away, and discouraged those that were driven away from all thoughts of returning. Their case is bad who have reason to expect better treatment among strangers than in their own country. It may be meant of those of the flock that went astray from God and their duty; and the priests, that should have taught the good knowledge of the Lord, used no means to convince and reclaim them, so that they became an easy prey to seducers. Thus were *they scattered because there was no shepherd*, v. 5. There were those that called themselves shepherds, but really they were not. Note, Those that do not do the work of shepherds are unworthy of the name. And if those that undertake to be shepherds are *foolish shepherds* (Zech. xi. 15), if they are proud and above their business, idle and do not love their business, or faithless and unconcerned about it, the case of the flock is as bad as if it were without a shepherd. Better no shepherd than such shepherds. Christ complains that his flock were *as sheep having no shepherd*, when yet the scribes and Pharisees *sat in Moses' seat*, Matt. ix. 36. It is ill with the patient when his physician is his worst disease, ill with the flock when the shepherds drive them away and disperse them, *by ruling them with force*.

7 Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; 8 *As I live*, saith the LORD GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because *there was no shepherd*, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; 9 There-

fore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; 10 Thus saith the LORD GOD; Behold, *I am against the shepherds*; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. 11 For thus saith the LORD GOD; Behold, *I, even I*, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are scattered*; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and *in a fat pasture* shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the LORD GOD. 16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up *that which was broken*, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

Upon reading the foregoing articles of impeachment drawn up, in God's name, against the shepherds of Israel, we cannot but look upon the shepherds with a just indignation, and upon the flock with a tender compassion. God, by the prophet, here expresses both in a high degree; and the shepherds are called upon (v. 7, 9) to *hear the word of the Lord*, to hear this word. Let them hear how little he regards them, who made much of themselves, and how much he regards the flock, which they made nothing of; both will be humbling to them. Those that will not *hear the word of the Lord* giving them their direction shall be made to hear the word of the Lord reading them their doom. Now see here,

I. How much displeased God is at the shepherds. Their crimes are repeated, v. 8.



God's flock became a prey to the deceivers first that drew them to idolatry, and then to the destroyers that carried them into captivity; and these shepherds took no care to prevent either the one or the other, but were as if there had been *no shepherds*; and therefore God says (v. 10), and confirms it with an oath (v. 8), *I am against the shepherds*. They had a commission from God to feed the flock, and made use of his name in what they did, expecting he would stand by them. "No," says God, "so far from that, *I am against them*." Note, It is not our having the name and authority of shepherds that will engage God for us, if we do not the work enjoined us, and be not faithful to the trust reposed in us. God is *against them*, and they shall know it; for, 1. They shall be made to account for the manner in which they have discharged their trust: "*I will require my flock at their hands, and charge it upon them that so many of them are missing*." Note, Those will have a great deal to answer for in the judgment-day who take upon them the care of souls and yet take no care of them. Ministers must *watch* and work as those that *must give account*, Heb. xiii. 17. 2. They shall be deprived *officio et beneficio*—both of the work and of the wages. *They shall cease from feeding the flock*, that is, from pretending to feed it. Note, It is just with God to take out of men's hands that power which they have abused and that trust which they have betrayed. But, if this were all their punishment, they could bear it well enough; therefore it is added, "*Neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more, for I will deliver my flock from their mouth*, which, instead of protecting, they had made a prey of." Note, Those that are enriching themselves with the spoils of the public cannot expect that they shall always be suffered to do so. Nor will God always permit his people to be trampled upon by those that should support them, but will find a time to deliver them from the shepherds their false friends, as well as from the lions their open enemies.

II. How much concerned God is for the flock; he speaks as if he were the more concerned for them because he saw them thus neglected, for *with him the fatherless finds mercy*. Precious promises are made here upon the occasion, which were to have their accomplishment in the return of the Jews out of their captivity and their re-establishment in their own land. Let the shepherds *hear this word of the Lord*, and know that they have no part nor lot in the matter. But let the poor sheep hear it and take the comfort of it. Note, Though magistrates and ministers fail in doing their part, for the good of the church, yet God will not fail in doing his; he will take the flock into his own hand rather than the church shall come short of any kindness he has designed for it. The under-shepherds may prove careless,

but the chief Shepherd *neither slumbers nor sleeps*. They may be false, but God *abides faithful*.

1. God will gather his sheep together that were scattered, and bring those back to the fold that had wandered from it: "*I, even I, who alone can do it, will do it, and will have all the glory of it. I will both search my sheep and find them out* (v. 11) as a *shepherd* does (v. 12), and bring them back as he does the stray-sheep, upon his shoulders, *from all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day*." There are cloudy and dark days, windy and stormy ones, which scatter God's sheep, which send them hither and thither, to divers and distant places, in quest of secrecy and safety. But, (1.) Wherever they are the eye of God will *find them out*; for his eyes run to and fro through the earth, in favour of them. *I will seek out my sheep*; and not one that belongs to the fold, though driven ever so far off, shall be lost. *The Lord knows those that are his*; he *knows their work and where they dwell* (Rev. ii. 13), and where they are hidden. (2.) When his time shall come his arms will *fetch them home* (v. 13): *I will bring them out from the people*. God will both incline their hearts to come by his grace and will by his providence open a door for them and remove every difficulty that lies in the way. They shall not return one by one, clandestinely stealing away, but they shall return in a body: "*I will gather them from the countries* into which they are dispersed, not only the most considerable families of them, but every particular person. *I will seek that which was lost and bring again that which was driven away*," v. 16. This was done when so many thousand Jews returned triumphantly out of Babylon, under the conduct of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and others. When those that have gone astray from God into the paths of sin are brought back by repentance, when those that erred come to the acknowledgment of the truth, when God's outcasts are gathered and restored, and religious assemblies, that were dispersed, rally again, upon the ceasing of persecution, and when the churches have rest and liberty, then this promise has a further accomplishment.

2. God will feed his people as the *sheep of his pasture*, that had been famished. God will bring the returning captives safely to their own land (v. 13), *will feed them upon the mountains of Israel*, and that is a *good pasture*, and a *fat pasture* (v. 14); there shall their *feeding be*, and there shall be *their fold*; and it is a *good fold*. There God will not only *feed them*, but *cause them to lie down* (v. 15), which denotes a comfortable rest after they had tired themselves with their wanderings, and a constant continuing residence; they shall not be driven out again from these green pastures, as they have been, nor shall they be disturbed, but shall lie down in a sweet repose and there shall be

*none to make them afraid.* Ps. xxiii. 2, *He makes me to lie down in green pastures.* Compare this with the like promise (Jer. xxiii. 3, 4), when God restored them not only to the milk and honey of their own land, to the enjoyment of its fruits, but to the privileges of his sanctuary on Mount Zion, the chief of the mountains of Israel. When they had an altar and a temple again, and the benefit of a settled priesthood, then they were fed in a good pasture.

3. He will succour those that are hurt, will *bind up that which was broken and strengthen that which was sick*, will comfort those that *mourn in Zion* and with Zion. If ministers, who should speak peace to those who are of a sorrowful spirit, neglect their duty, yet the Holy Ghost the Comforter will be faithful to his office. But, as it follows, *the fat and the strong shall be destroyed.* He that has rest for disquieted saints has terror to speak to presumptuous sinners. *As every valley shall be filled, so every mountain and hill shall be brought low,* Luke iii. 5.

17 And *as for* you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats. 18 *Seemeth it* a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet? 19 And *as for* my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. 20 Therefore thus saith the Lord God unto them; Behold, I, *even I*, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. 21 Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; 22 Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. 23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken *it*. 25 And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely

in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. 26 And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. 27 And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. 28 And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make *them* afraid. 29 And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. 30 Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God *am* with them, and *that* they, *even* the house of Israel, *are* my people, saith the Lord God. 31 And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are* men, and I *am* your God, saith the Lord God.

The prophet has no more to say to the shepherds, but he has now a message to deliver to the flock. God had ordered him to speak tenderly to them, and to assure them of the mercy he had in store for them. But here he is ordered to make a difference between some and others of them, to separate between the precious and the vile and then to give them a promise of the Messiah, by whom this distinction should be effectually made, partly at his first coming (for *for judgment he came into this world*, John ix. 39, *to fill the hungry with good things and to send the rich empty away*, Luke i. 53), but completely at his second coming, when he shall, as it is here said, *judge between cattle and cattle, as a shepherd divides between the sheep and the goats, and shall set the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left* (Matt. xxv. 32, 33), which seems to have reference to this. We have here,

I. Conviction spoken to those of the flock that were fat and strong, the *rams and the he-goats* (v. 17), those that, though they had not power, as shepherds and rulers, to oppress with, yet, being rich and wealthy, made use of the opportunity which this gave them to bear hard upon their poor neighbours. Those that have much would have more, and, if they set to it, will have more,



so many ways have they of encroaching upon their poor neighbours, and forcing from them the one ewe-lamb, 2 Sam. xii. 4. Do not the rich oppress the poor merely with the help of their riches, and draw them before the judgment-seats? Jam. ii. 6. Poor servants and tenants are hardly used by their rich lords and masters. The rams and the he-goats not only kept all the good pasture to themselves, ate the fat and drank the sweet, but they would not let the poor of the flock have any comfortable enjoyment of the little that was left them; they trod down the residue of the pastures and fouled the residue of the waters, so that the flock was obliged to eat that which they had trodden into the dirt, and drink that which they had muddied, v. 18, 19. This intimates that the great men not only by extortion and oppression made and kept their neighbours poor, and scarcely left them enough to subsist on, but were so vexatious to them that what little coarse fare they had was embittered to them. And this seemed a small thing to them; they thought there was no harm in it, as if it were the privilege of their quality to be injurious to all their neighbours. Note, Many that live in pomp and at ease themselves care not what straits those about them are reduced to, so they may but have every thing to their mind. Those that are at ease, and the proud, grudge that any body should live by them with any comfort. But this was not all; they not only robbed the poor, to make them poorer, but were troublesome to the sick and weak of the flock (v. 21): They thrust with side and shoulder those that were feeble (for the weakest goes to the wall) and pushed the diseased with their horns, because they knew they could be too hard for them, when they durst not meddle with their match. It has been observed concerning sheep that if one of the flock be sick and faint the rest will secure it as well as they can, and shelter it from the scorching heat of the sun; but these, on the contrary, were most injurious to the diseased. Those that they could not serve themselves of they did what they could to rid the country of, and so scattered them abroad, as if the poor, whom, Christ says, we must have always with us, were public nuisances, not to be relieved, but sent far away from us. Note, It is a barbarous thing to add affliction to the afflicted. Perhaps these rams and he-goats are designed to represent the scribes and Pharisees, for they are such troublers of the church as Christ himself must come to deliver it from, v. 23. They devoured widows' houses, took away the key of knowledge, corrupted the pure water of divine truths, and oppressed the consciences of men with the traditions of the elders, besides that they were continually vexatious and injurious to the poor of the flock that waited on the Lord, Zech. xi. 11. Note, It is no new thing for the flock of God to receive a great deal of damage and mischief from those that are

themselves of the flock, and in eminent stations in it, Acts xx. 30.

II. Comfort spoken to those of the flock that are poor and feeble, and that wait for the consolation of Israel (v. 22). "*I will save my flock*, and they shall no more be spoiled as they have been by the beasts of prey, by their own shepherds or by the rams and he-goats among themselves." Upon this occasion, as is usual in the prophets, comes in a prediction of the coming of the Messiah, and the setting up of his kingdom, and the exceedingly great and precious benefits which the church should enjoy under the protection and influence of that kingdom. Observe what is here foretold,

1. Concerning the Messiah himself. (1.) He shall have his commission from God himself: *I will set him up* (v. 23); *I will raise him up*, v. 29. He sanctified and sealed him, appointed and anointed him. (2.) He shall be the great Shepherd of the sheep, who shall do that for his flock which no one else could do. He is the one Shepherd, under whom Jews and Gentiles should be one fold. (3.) He is God's servant, employed by him and for him, and doing all in obedience to his will, with an eye to his glory—his servant, to re-establish his kingdom among men and advance the interests of that kingdom. (4.) He is David, one after God's own heart, set as his King upon the holy hill of Zion, made the head of the corner, with whom the covenant of royalty is made, and to whom God would give the throne of his father David. He is both the root and offspring of David (5.) He is the plant of renown, because a righteous branch (Jer. xxiii. 5), a branch of the Lord, that is beautiful and glorious, Isa. iv. 2. He has a name above every name, a throne above every throne, and may therefore well be called a branch of renown. Some understand it of the church, the planting of the Lord, Isa. lxi. 3. *Its name shall be remembered* (Ps. xlv. 17) and Christ's in it.

2. Concerning the great charter by which the kingdom of the Messiah should be incorporated, and upon which it should be founded (v. 25): *I will make with them a covenant of peace*. The covenant of grace is a covenant of peace. In it God is at peace with us, speaks peace to us, and assures us of peace, of all good, all the good we need to make us happy. The tenour of this covenant is: "*I the Lord will be their God*, a God all-sufficient to them (v. 24), will own them and will be owned by them; in order to this *my servant David shall be a prince among them*, to reduce them to their allegiance, to receive their homage, and to reign over them, in them, and for them." Note, Those, and those only, that have the Lord Jesus for their prince have the Lord Jehovah for their God. And then they, even the house of Israel, shall be my people. If we take God to be our God, he will take us to be his people. From this covenant between God and Israel

there results communion : “ *I the Lord their God am with them, to converse with them ; and they shall know it, and have the comfort of it.*”

3. Concerning the privileges of those that are the faithful subjects of this kingdom of the Messiah and interested in the covenant of peace. These are here set forth figuratively, as the blessings of the flock. But we have a key to it, v. 31. Those that belong to this flock, though they are spoken of as *sheep*, are really men, men that have the Lord for their God, and are in covenant with him. Now to them it is promised,

(1.) That they shall enjoy a holy security under the divine protection. Christ, our good Shepherd, has caused the evil beasts to cease out of the land (v. 25), having vanquished all our spiritual enemies, broken their power, and triumphed over them ; the roaring lion is not a roaring devouring lion to them ; *they shall no more be a prey to the heathen nor the heathen a terror to them, neither shall the beasts of the land devour them.* Sir and Satan, death and hell, are conquered. And then *they shall dwell safely*, not only in the folds, but in the fields, *in the wilderness, in the woods*, where the beasts of prey are ; they shall not only dwell there, but they shall sleep there, which denotes not only that the beasts being made to cease there shall be no danger, but, their consciences being purified and pacified, they shall be in no apprehension of danger ; not only safe from evil, but quiet from the fear of evil. Note, Those may lay down and sleep securely, sleep at ease, that have Christ for their prince ; for he will be their protector, and make them to dwell in safety. None shall hurt them, nay, *none shall make them afraid.* If God be for us, who can be against us ? *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed.* Through Christ, God delivers his people not only from the things they have reason to fear, but from their fear even of death itself, from all that fear that has torment. This safety from evil is promised (v. 27) : *They shall be safe in their land*, in no danger of being invaded and enslaved, though their great plenty be a temptation to their neighbours to desire their land ; and that which shall make them think themselves safe is their confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God : *They shall know that I am the Lord.* All our disquieting fears arise from our ignorance of God and mistakes concerning him. Their experience of his particular care concerning them encourages their confidence in him : “ *I have broken the bands of their yoke, with which they have been brought and held down under oppression, and have delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them, whence they shall argue, He that has delivered does, and will, therefore will we dwell safely.*” This is explained, and applied to our gospel-state, Luke i. 74. *That*

*we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, as those may do that serve him in faith.*

(2.) That they shall enjoy a spiritual plenty of all good things, the best things, for their comfort and happiness : *They shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, v. 29.* Famine and scarcity, when Israel was punished with that judgment, turned as much to their reproach among the heathen as any other, because the fruitfulness of Canaan was so much talked of. But now *they shall not bear that shame of the heathen any more.* For the showers shall come down in their season, even showers of blessing, v. 26. Christ is a Shepherd that will feed his people ; and they shall go in and out, and find pasture. [1.] They shall not be consumed with hunger ; for they shall not be put off with the world for a portion, which is not bread, which satisfies not, and which leaves those that are put off with it to be consumed with hunger. The ordinances of the ceremonial law are called *beggarly elements*, for there was little in them, compared with the Christian institutes, *wherewith the mower fills his hand and he that binds sheaves his bosom.* Those that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall not be consumed with that hunger, for *they shall be filled.* And he that drinks of the water that Christ gives him, the still waters by which he leads his sheep, shall never thirst. [2.] Showers of blessings shall come upon them, v. 26, 27. The heavens shall yield their dews ; the trees of the field also shall yield their fruit. The seat of this plenty is God's hill, his holy hill of Zion, for on that mountain, in the gospel church, it is, that God has made to all nations a feast ; to that those must join themselves who would partake of gospel benefits. The cause of this plenty is the showers that come down in their season, that descend upon the mountains of Zion, the graces of Christ, his doctrine that drops as the dew, the graces of Christ, and the gifts and comforts of his Spirit, by which we are made fruitful in the fruits of righteousness. The instances of this plenty are the blessings of heaven poured down upon us and the productions of grace brought forth by us, our comfort in God's favour and God's glory in our fruit-bearing. The extent of this plenty is very large, to all the places round about my hill ; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, shall go forth light to a dark world, and the river that shall water a dry and desert world ; all that are in the neighbourhood of Zion shall fare the better for it ; and the nearer the church the nearer its God. And, lastly, The effect of this plenty is, *I will make them a blessing, eminently and exemplarily blessed, patterns of happiness, Isa. xix. 24.* Or, They shall be blessings to all about them, diffusively useful. Note, Those that are the blessed of the Lord must study to make themselves blessings to the world. He that is good,



let him do good; he that has received the gift, the grace, let him minister the same.

Now this promise of the Messiah and his kingdom spoke much comfort to those to whom it was then made, for they might be sure that God would not utterly *destroy* their nation, how low soever it might be brought, as long as that *blessing* was in the womb of it, Isa. lxxv. 8. But it speaks much more comfort to us, to whom it is fulfilled, who are the sheep of this good Shepherd, are fed in his pastures, and *blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things* by him.

## CHAP. XXXV.

It was promised, in the foregoing chapter, that when the time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, should come, especially the time for sending the Messiah and setting up his kingdom in the world, God would cause the enemies of his church to cease and the blessings and comforts of the church to abound. This chapter enlarges upon the former promise, concerning the destruction of the enemies of the church; the next chapter upon the latter promise, the replenishing of the church with blessings. Mount Seir (that is, Edom) is the enemy prophesied against in this chapter, but *saith* put here, as in the prophecy of Obadiah, for all the enemies of the church; for, as those all walked in the way of Cain that hated Abel, so those all walked in the way of Esau who hated Jacob, but over whom Jacob, by virtue of a particular blessing, was to have dominion. Now here we have, I. The sin charged upon the Edomites, and that was their spite and malice to Israel, ver. 5, 10-13. II. The ruin threatened, that should come upon them for this sin. God will be against them (ver. 3) and then their country shall be laid waste (ver. 4), depopulated, and made quite desolate (ver. 6-9), and left so when other nations that had been wasted should recover themselves, ver. 14, 15.

**M**OREOVER the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face against mount Seir, and prophesy against it, 3 And say unto it, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O mount Seir, I *am* against thee, and I will stretch out mine hand against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. 4 I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate, and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD. 5 Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time *that their iniquity had an end*: 6 Therefore, *as I live*, saith the Lord God, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. 7 Thus will I make mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out and him that returneth. 8 And I will fill his mountains with his slain *men*: in thy hills, and in thy valleys, and in all thy rivers, shall they fall that are slain with the sword. 9 I will make thee perpetual desolations, and thy cities shall not return: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Mount Seir was mentioned as partner with

Moab in one of the threatenings we had before (*ch. xxv. 8*); but here it is convicted and condemned by itself, and has woes of its own. The prophet must boldly *set his face against Edom*, and *prophesy particularly against it*; for the God of Israel has said, *O Mount Seir! I am against thee*. Note, Those that have God against them have the word of God against them, and the face of his ministers, nor dare they prophesy any good to them, but evil. The prophet must tell the Edomites that God has a controversy with them, and let them know,

I. What is the cause and ground of that controversy, v. 5. God espouses his people's cause, and will plead it, takes what is done against them as done against himself, and will reckon for it; and it is upon their account that God now contends with the Edomites.

1. Because of the enmity they had against the people of God, that was rooted in the heart. "Thou hast had a *perpetual hatred* to them, to the very name of an Israelite." The Edomites kept up an *hereditary* malice against Israel, the same that Esau bore to Jacob, because he got the birth-right and the blessing. Esau had been reconciled to Jacob, had embraced and kissed him (*Gen. xxxiii.*), and we do not find that ever he quarrelled with him again. But the posterity of Esau would never be reconciled to the seed of Jacob, but hated them with a perpetual hatred. Note, Children will be more apt to imitate the vices than the virtues of their parents, and to tread in the steps of their sin than in the steps of their repentance. Parents should therefore be careful not to set their children any bad example, for though, through the grace of God, they may return, and prevent the mischief of what they have done amiss to themselves, they may not be able to obviate the bad influence of it upon their children. It is strange how deeply-rooted national antipathies sometimes are, and how long they last; but it is not to be wondered at that profane Edomites hate pious Israelites, since the old *enmity* that was put between the *seed of the woman* and the seed of the serpent (*Gen. iii. 15*) will continue to the end. *Marvel not if the world hate you*.

2. Because of the injuries they had done to the people of God. They *shed their blood by the force of the sword, in the time of their calamity*; they did not attack them as fair and open enemies, but laid wait for them, to *cut off* those of them that had escaped (*Obad. 14*), or they drove them back upon the sword of the pursuers, by which they fell. It was cowardly, as well as barbarous, to take advantage of their distress; and for neighbours, with whom they had lived peaceably, to *smite them secretly* when strangers openly invaded them. It was in the time *that their iniquity had an end*, when the measure of it was full and destruction came. Note, Even those that suffer justly, and for their sins, are yet to be pitied and not trampled upon. If the father corrects one child,

he expects the rest should tremble at it, not triumph in it.

II. What should be the effect and issue of that controversy. If God stretch out his hand against the country of Edom, he will *make it most desolate*, v. 3. *Desolation and desolation*. 1. The inhabitants shall be slain with the sword (v. 6): *I will prepare thee unto blood*. Edom shall be gradually weakened, and so be the more easily conquered, and the enemy shall gather strength the more effectually to subdue it. Thus preparation is in the making a great while before for this destruction. *Thou hast not hated blood*; it implies, "Thou hast delighted in it and thirsted after it." Those that do not keep up a rooted hatred of sin, when a temptation to it is very strong, will be in danger of yielding to it. Some read it, "*Unless thou hatest blood*" (that is, "unless thou dost repent, and put off this bloody disposition) *blood shall pursue thee*." And then it is an intimation that the judgment may yet be prevented by a thorough reformation. *If he turn not, he will whet his sword*, Ps. vii. 12. But, if he turn, he will lay it by. *Blood shall pursue thee*, the *guilt* of the blood which thou hast shed or the *judgment* of blood; thy blood-thirsty enemies shall pursue thee, which way soever thou seekest to make thy escape. A great and general slaughter shall be made of the Idumeans, such as had been foretold (Is. xxxiv. 6): *The mountains and hills, the valleys and rivers, shall be filled with the slain*, v. 8. The pursuers shall overtake those that flee and shall give no quarter, but put them all to the sword. Note, When God comes to make inquisition for blood those that have shed the blood of his Israel shall have blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. *Satia te sanguine quem sitisti—Gilt thyself with blood, after which thou hast thirsted*. 2. The country shall be laid waste. The cities shall be destroyed (v. 4), the *country made most desolate* (v. 7); for God will *cut off* from both him that *passes out* and *him that returns*; and when the inhabitants are cut off that should keep the cities in repair they will decay and go into ruins, and when those are cut off that should till the land that will soon be over-run with briars and thorns and become a wilderness. Note, Those that help forward the desolations of Israel may expect to be themselves made desolate. And that which completes the judgment is that Edom shall be made *perpetual desolations* (v. 9) and the cities shall never return to their former state, nor the inhabitants of them come back from their captivity and dispersion. Note, Those that have a perpetual enmity to God and his people, as the carnal mind has, can expect no other than to be made a perpetual desolation. Implacable malice will justly be punished with irreparable ruin.

10 Because thou hast said, These

two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the LORD was there: 11 Therefore, *as* I live, saith the LORD God, I will even do according to thine anger, and according to thine envy which thou hast used out of thy hatred against them; and I will make myself known among them, when I have judged thee. 12 And thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD, and that I have heard all thy blasphemies which thou hast spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they are given us to consume. 13 Thus with your mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me: I have heard *them*. 14 Thus saith the LORD God; When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate. 15 As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, O mount Seir, and all Idumea, *even* all of it: and they shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Here is, I. A further account of the sin of the Edomites, and their bad conduct towards the people of God. We find the church complaining of them for setting on the Babylonians, and irritating them against Jerusalem, saying, *Rase it, rase it*, down with it, down with it (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), inflaming a rage that needed no spur; here it is further charged upon them that they triumphed in Jerusalem's ruin and in the desolations of the country. Many *blasphemies* they spoke against the *mountains of Israel*, saying, with pride and pleasure, *They are laid desolate*, v. 12. Note, The troubles of God's church, as they give proofs of the constancy and fidelity of its friends, so they discover and draw out the corruptions of its enemies, in whom there then appears more brutish malice than one would have thought of. Now their triumphing in Jerusalem's ruin is here said to proceed, 1. From a sinful passion against the people of Israel; from *anger* and *envy*, and *hatred against them* (v. 11), that *perpetual hatred* spoken of v. 5. Though they were not a match for them, and therefore could not do them a mischief themselves, yet they were glad when the Chaldeans did them a mischief. 2. From a sinful appetite to the land of Israel. They pleased themselves with hopes that when the people of Israel were destroyed they should be let into the possession of their country, which they had so often grudged and envied them. They thought they could make out something of a



title to it, *ob defectum sanguinis*—for want of other heirs. If Jacob's issue fail, they think that they are next in the entail, and that the remainder will be to his brother's issue: "*These two nations of Judah and Israel shall be mine.*" Now is the time for me to put in for them." At least they hope to come in as first occupants, being near neighbours: *We will possess it* when it is deserted. *Ceditur occupanti*—*Let us get possession and that will be title enough.* Note, Those have the spirit of Edomites who desire the death of others because they hope to get by it, or are pleased with their failing because they expect to come into their business. When we see the vanity of the world in the disappointments, losses, and crosses, that others meet with in it, instead of showing ourselves, upon such an occasion, greedy of it, we should rather be made thereby to sit more loose to it, and both take our affections off it and lower our expectations from it. But in this case of the Edomites' coveting the land of Israel, and gaping for it, there was a particular affront to God, when they said, "*These lands are given us to devour*, and we shall have our bellies full of their riches." God says, *You have boasted against me and have multiplied your words against me*; for they expected possession upon a vacancy, because Israel was driven out, *whereas the Lord was still there*, v. 10. His temple indeed was burnt, and the other tokens of his presence were gone; but his promise to give that land to the seed of Jacob for an inheritance was not made void, but remained in full force and virtue; and by that promise he did in effect still keep possession for Israel, till they should in due time be restored to it. That was Immanuel's land (Isa. viii. 8); in that land he was to be born, and therefore that people shall continue in it of whom he is to be born, till he has passed his time in it, and then let who will take it. *The Lord is there*, the Lord Jesus is to be there; and therefore Israel's discontinuance of possession is no defeasance of their right, but it shall be kept for them, and they shall have, hold, and enjoy it by virtue of the divine grant, till the promise of this Canaan shall by the Messiah be changed into the promise of a far better. Note, It is a piece of presumption highly offensive to God for Edomites to lay claim to those privileges and comforts that are peculiar to God's chosen Israel and are reserved for them. It is *blasphemy against the mountains of Israel*, the holy mountains, to say, because they are for the present made a prey of and trodden under foot of the Gentiles (Rev. xi. 2), even the holy city itself, that therefore the Lord has forsaken them, their God has forgotten them. The apostle will by no means admit such a thought as this, that *God hath cast away his people*, Rom. xi. 1. No; though they are cast down for a time, they are not cast off for ever. Those *reproach the Lord* who say they are.

II. The notice God took of the barbarous insolence of the Edomites, and the doom passed upon them for it: *I have heard all thy blasphemies*, v. 12. And again (v. 13), *You have multiplied your words against me, and I have heard them*, I have observed them, I have kept an account of them. Note, In the multitude of words, not one escapes God's cognizance; let men speak ever so much, ever so fast, though they multiply words, which they themselves regard not, but forget immediately, yet none of them are lost in the crowd, not the most idle words; but God hears them, and will be able to charge the sinner with them. All the haughty and hard speeches, particularly, which are spoken against the Israel of God, the words which are *magnified* (as it is in the margin, v. 13) as well as the words which are multiplied, God takes notice of. For, as the most trifling words are not below his cognizance, so the most daring are not above his rebuke. *I have heard all thy blasphemies.* This is a good reason why we should bear reproach as if we heard it not, because *God will hear*, Ps. xxxviii. 13, 15. God has heard the Edomites' blasphemy; let them therefore hear their doom, v. 14, 15. It was a national sin (the blasphemies charged upon them were the sense and language of all the Edomites), and therefore shall be punished with a national desolation. And, 1. It shall be a distinguishing punishment. As God has peculiar favours for Israelites, so he has peculiar plagues for Edomites: so that "*When the whole earth rejoices I will make thee desolate*; when other nations have their desolations repaired, to their joy, thine shall be *perpetual*," v. 9. 2. The punishment shall answer to the sin: "*As thou didst rejoice in the desolation of the house of Israel*, God will give thee enough of desolation; since thou art so fond of it, *thou shalt be desolate*; *I will make thee so*." Note, Those who, instead of weeping with the mourners, make a jest of their grievances, may justly be made to weep like the mourners, and themselves to feel the weight, to feel the smart, of those grievances which they set so light by. Some read v. 14 so as to complete the resemblance between the sin and the punishment: *The whole earth shall rejoice when I make thee desolate, as thou didst rejoice when Israel was made desolate.* Those that are glad at the death and fall of others, may expect that others will be glad of their death, of their fall. 3. In the destruction of the enemies of the church God designs his own glory, and we may be sure that he will not come short of his design. (1.) That which he intends is to manifest himself, as a just and jealous God, firm to his covenant and faithful to his people and their injured cause (v. 11): *I will make myself known among them when I have judged thee.* The Lord is and will be known by the judgments which he executes. (2.) His intention shall be fully answered; not

only his own people shall be made to know it to their comfort, but even the Edomites themselves, and all the other enemies of his name and people, *shall know that he is the Lord*, v. 4, 9, 15. As the works of creation and common providence demonstrate that there is a God, so the care taken of Israel shows that Jehovah, the God of Israel, is that God alone, the true and living God.

CHAP. XXXVI.

We have done with Mount Seir, and left it desolate, and likely to continue so, and must now turn ourselves, with the prophet, to the mountains of Israel, which we find desolate too, but hope before we have done with the chapter to leave in better plight. Here are two distinct prophecies in this chapter:—1. Here is one that seems chiefly to relate to the temporal estate of the Jews, wherein their present deplorable condition is described and the triumphs of their neighbours in it; but it is promised that their grievances shall be all redressed and that in due time they shall be settled again in their own land, in the midst of peace and plenty, ver. 1—15. 2. Here is another that seems chiefly to concern their spiritual estate, wherein they are reminded of their former sins and God's judgments upon them, to humble them for their sins and under God's mighty hand, ver. 16—20. But it is promised, 1. That God would glorify himself in showing mercy to them, ver. 21—24. 2. That he would sanctify them, by giving them his grace and fitting them for his service; and this for his own name's sake and in answer to their prayers, ver. 25—38.

**A**LSO, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord: 2 Thus saith the Lord God; Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are our's in possession: 3 Therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Because they have made *you* desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and *are* an infamy of the people: 4 Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which became a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen that *are* round about; 5 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed my land into their possession with the joy of all *their* heart, with spiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey. 6 Prophecy therefore concerning the land of Israel, and say unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I have spoken

in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: 7 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that *are* about you, they shall bear their shame. 8 But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come. 9 For, behold, I *am* for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: 10 And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, *even* all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: 11 And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better *unto you* than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord. 12 Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, *even* my people Israel; and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them *of men*. 13 Thus saith the Lord God; Because they say unto you, Thou *land* devourest up men, and hast bereaved thy nations; 14 Therefore thou shalt devour men no more, neither bereave thy nations any more, saith the Lord God. 15 Neither will I cause *men* to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more, neither shalt thou cause thy nations to fall any more, saith the Lord God.

The prophet had been ordered to set his face *towards the mountains of Israel* and *prophesy against them*, ch. vi. 2. Then God was coming forth to contend with his people; but now that God is returning in mercy to them he must speak good words and comfortable words to these mountains, v. 1 and again v. 4. *You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord*; and what he says to them he says to the hills, to the rivers, to the valleys, to the desolate wastes in the country, and to the cities that are forsaken, v. 4 and again v. 6. The people were gone, some one way and some another; nothing remained there to be spoken to but the places, the mountains and valleys; these the Chaldeans could not carry away with them. *The earth abides for ever*. Now, to show the mercy God



had in reserve for the people, he is to speak of him as having a dormant kindness for the place, which, if the Lord had been pleased for ever to abandon, he would not have called upon to *hear the word of the Lord*, nor *would he as at this time have shown it such things as these*. Here is,

I. The compassionate notice God takes of the present deplorable condition of the land of Israel. It has become both a *prey* and a *derision to the heathen that are round about*, v. 4. 1. It has become a prey to them; and they are all enriched with the plunder of it. When the Chaldeans had conquered them all their neighbours flew to the spoil as to a shipwreck, every one thinking all his own that he could lay his hands on (v. 3): *They have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that you might be a possession to the heathen, to the residue of them*, even such as had themselves narrowly escaped the like desolation. No one thought it any crime to strip an Israelite. *Turba Romæ sequitur fortunam ut semper—The mob of Rome still praise the elevated and despise the fallen*. It is the common cry, when a man is down, *Down with him*. 2. It has become a derision to them. They took all they had and laughed at them when they had done. *The enemy said, "Aha! even the ancient high places are ours in possession"*, v. 2. Neither the antiquity, nor the dignity, neither the sanctity nor the fortifications, of the land of Israel, are its security, but we have become masters of it all." The more honours that land had been adorned with, and the greater figure it had made among the nations, the more pride and pleasure did they take in making a spoil of it, which is an instance of a base and sordid spirit; for the more glorious the prosperity was the more piteous is the adversity. God takes notice of it here as an aggravation of the present calamity of Israel: *You are taken up in the lips of talkers and are an infamy of the people*, v. 3. All the talk of the country about was concerning the overthrow of the Jewish nation; and every one that spoke of it had some peevish ill-natured reflection or other upon them. They were the *scorning of those that were at ease and the contempt of the proud*, Ps. cxliii. 4. There are some that are noted for talkers, that have something to say of every body, but cannot find in their hearts to speak well of any body; God's people, among such people, were sure to be a reproach when the crown had fallen from their head. Thus it was the lot of Christianity, in its suffering days, to be *every where spoken against*.

II. The expressions of God's just displeasure against those who triumphed in the desolations of the land of Israel, as many of its neighbours did, even the residue of the brethren, and Idumea particularly. Let us see, 1. How they dealt with the Israel of God. They carved out large possessions to themselves out of their land, out of God's land;

for so indeed it was: "*They have appointed my land into their possession* (v. 5), and so not only invaded their neighbour's property, but intrenched upon God's prerogative." It was the holy land which they laid their sacrilegious hands upon. They did not own any dependence upon God, as the God of that land, nor acknowledge any remaining interest that Israel had in it, but *cast it out for a prey*, as if they had won it in a lawful war. And this they did without any dread of God and his judgments and without any compassion for Israel and their calamities, but with the *joy of all their hearts*, because they got by it, and *with despicable minds* to Israel that lost by it. Increasing wealth, by right or wrong, is all the joy of a worldly heart; and the calamities of God's people are all the joy of a despicable mind. And those that had not an opportunity of making a prey of God's people made a reproach of them; so that they were *the shame of the heathen*, v. 6. Every body ridiculed them and made a jest of them; and the truth is they had by their own sin made themselves vile; so that God was righteous herein, but men were unrighteous and very barbarous. 2. How God would deal with those who were thus in word and deed abusive to his people. He has *spoken against the heathen*; he has passed sentence upon them; he has determined to reckon with them for it, and this *in the fire of his jealousy*, both for his own honour and for the honour of his people, v. 5. Having a love for both as *strong as death*, he has a *jealousy* for both as *cruel as the grave*. They spoke in their malice against God's people, and he will speak in his jealousy against them; and it is easy to say which will speak most powerfully. God will speak *in his jealousy and in his fury*, v. 6. Fury is not in God; but he will exert his power against them and handle them as severely as men do when they are in a fury. He will *so speak to them in his wrath as to vex them in his sore displeasure*. What he says he will stand to, for it is backed with an oath. He has *lifted up his hand* and sworn by himself, has sworn and will not repent. And what is it that is said with so much heat, and yet with so much deliberation? It is this (v. 7), *Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame*. Note, The righteous God, to whom vengeance belongs, will render shame for shame. Those that put contempt and reproach upon God's people will, sooner or later, have it *turned upon themselves*, perhaps in this world (either their follies or their calamities, their miscarriages or their mischances, shall be their reproach), at furthest in that day when all the impenitent shall *rise to shame and everlasting contempt*.

III. The promises of God's favour to his Israel and assurances given of great mercy God had in store for them. God takes occasion from the outrage and insolence of



their enemies to show himself so much the more concerned for them and ready to do them good, as David hoped that God would recompense him good for Shimei's cursing him. *Let them curse, but bless thou.* In this way, as well as others, the enemies of God's people do them real service, even by the injuries they do them, against their will and beyond their intention. We shall have no reason to complain if, the more unkind men are, the more kind God is—if, the more kindly he speaks to us by his word and Spirit, the more kindly he acts for us in his providence. The prophet must say so to the *mountains of Israel*, which were now *desolate and despised*, that God is for them and will turn to them, v. 9. As the curse of God reaches the ground for man's sake, so does the blessing. Now that which is promised is, 1. That their rightful owners should return to the possession of them: *My people Israel are at hand to come*, v. 8. Though they are at a great distance from their own country, though they are dispersed in many countries, and though they are detained by the power of their enemies, yet they shall come again to their own border, Jer. xxxi. 17. The time is at hand for their return. Though there were above forty years of the seventy (perhaps fifty) yet remaining, it is spoken of as near, because it is sure, and there were some among them that should live to see it. *A thousand years* are with God but as one day. The mountains of Israel are now desolate; but God will cause men to walk upon them again, even his people Israel, not as travellers passing over them, but as inhabitants—not tenants, but freeholders: *They shall possess thee*, not for term of life, but for themselves and their heirs; *thou shalt be their inheritance*. It was a type of the heavenly Canaan, to which all God's children are heirs, every Israelite indeed, and into which they shall shortly be all brought together, out of the countries where they are now scattered. 2. That they should afford a plentiful comfortable maintenance for their owners at their return. When the land had enjoyed her sabbaths for so many years, it should be so much the more fruitful afterwards, as we should be after rest, especially a sabbath rest: *You shall be tilled and sown* (v. 9) and shall yield your fruit to my people Israel, v. 8. Note, It is a blessing to the earth to be made serviceable to men, especially to good men, that will serve God with cheerfulness in the use of those good things which the earth serves up to them. 3. That the people of Israel should have not only a comfortable sustenance, but a comfortable settlement, in their own land: *The cities shall be inhabited; the wastes shall be builded*, v. 10. And *I will settle you after your old estates*, v. 11. Their own sin had unsettled them, but now God's favour shall resettle them. When the prodigal son has become a penitent he is settled again in his father's

house, according to his former estate. Bring hither the *first robe*, and put it on him. *Nay, I will do better unto you now than at your beginnings.* There is more joy for the sheep that is brought back than there would have been if it had never gone astray. And God sometimes multiplies his people's comforts in proportion to the time that he has afflicted them. Thus God blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning, and doubled to him all he had. 4. That the people, after their return, should be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the land, so that it should not only be inhabited again, but as thickly inhabited, and as well peopled, as ever. God will bring back to it all the house of Israel, even all of it (observe what an emphasis is laid upon that, v. 10), all whose spirits God stirred up to return; and those only were reckoned of the house of Israel, the rest had cut themselves off from it; or, though but few, in comparison, returned at first, yet afterwards, at divers times, they all returned; and then (says God) *I will multiply these men* (v. 10), *multiply man and beast; and they shall increase*, v. 11. Note, God's kingdom in the world is a growing kingdom; and his church, though for a time it may be diminished, shall recover itself and be again replenished. 5. That the reproach long since cast upon the land of Israel by the evil spies, and of late revived, that it was a land that ate up the inhabitants of it by famine, sickness, and the sword, should be quite rolled away, and there should never be any more occasion for it. Canaan had got into a bad name. It had of old spued out the inhabitants (Lev. xviii. 28), the natives, the aborigines, which was turned to its reproach by those that should have put another construction upon it, Num. xiii. 32. It had of late devoured the Israelites, and spued them out too; so that it was commonly said of it, It is a land which, instead of supporting its nations or tribes that inhabit it, bereaves them, overthrows them, and causes them to fall; it is a tenement which breaks all the tenants that come upon it. This character it had got among the neighbours; but God now promises that it shall be so no more: *Thou shalt no more bereave them of men* (v. 12), *shalt devour men no more*, v. 14. But the inhabitants shall live to a good old age, and not have the number of their months cut off in the midst. Compare this with that promise, Zech. viii. 4. Note, God will take away the reproach of his people by taking away that which was the occasion of it. When the nation is made to flourish in peace, plenty, and power, then they hear no more the shame of the heathen (v. 15), especially when it is reformed; when sin, which is the reproach of any people, particularly of God's professing people, is taken away, then they hear no more the reproach of the people. Note, When God returns in mercy to a people that return to him in duty, all their



grievances will be soon redressed and their honour retrieved.

16 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 17 Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman. 18 Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols *wherewith* they had polluted it: 19 And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. 20 And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These *are* the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land. 21 But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. 22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not *this* for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. 23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

When God promised the poor captives a glorious return, in due time, to their own land, it was a great discouragement to their hopes that they were unworthy, utterly unworthy, of such a favour; therefore, to remove that discouragement, God here shows them that he would do it for them *purely for his own name's sake*, that he might be glorified in them and by them; that he might manifest and magnify his mercy and goodness, that attribute which of all others is most his glory. And, the restoration of that people being typical of our redemption by Christ, this is intended further to show that the ultimate end aimed at in our salvation,

to which all the steps of it were made subservient, was the glory of God. To this end Christ directed all he did in that short prayer, *Father, glorify thy name*; and God declared it was his end in all he did in the immediate answer given to that prayer, by a voice from heaven: *I have glorified it, and I will glorify it yet again*, John xii. 28. Now observe here,

1. How God's name had suffered both by the sins and by the miseries of Israel; and this was more to be regretted than all their sorrow, which they had brought upon themselves; for the honour of God lies nearer the hearts of good men than any interests of their own. 1. God's glory had been injured by the sin of Israel when they were in their own land, *v. 17*. It was a good land, a holy land, a land that had the eye of God upon it. *But they defiled it by their own way*, their wicked way; that is *our own way*, the way of our own choice; and we ourselves must bear the blame and shame of it. The sin of a people defiles their land, renders it abominable to God and uncomfortable to themselves; so that they cannot have any holy communion with him nor with one another. What was unclean might not be made use of. By the abuse of the gifts of God's bounty to us we forfeit the use of them; and, the mind and conscience being defiled with guilt, no comfort is allowed us, *nothing is pure* to us. Their way in the eye of God was like the pollution of a woman during the days of her separation, which shut her out from the sanctuary and made every thing she touched ceremonially unclean, Lev. xv. 19. Sin is that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*, and which he cannot endure to look upon. They *shed blood and worshipped idols* (*v. 18*) and with those sins *defiled the land*. For this God *poured out his fury* upon them, *scattered them among the heathen*. Their own land was sick of them, and they were sent into other lands. Herein God was righteous, and was justified in what he did; none could say that he did them any wrong, nay, he did justice to his own honour, for he *judged them according to their way and according to their doings*, *v. 19*. And yet, the matter being not rightly understood, he was not glorified in it; for the enemies did say, as Moses pleaded the Egyptians would say if he had destroyed them in the wilderness, that *for mischief he brought them forth*. Their neighbours considered them rather as a holy people than as a sinful people, and therefore took occasion from the calamities they were in, instead of glorifying God, as they might justly have done, to reproach him and put contempt upon him; and God's name was *continually every day blasphemed* by their oppressors, Isa. lii. 5. 2. When they *entered into the land of the heathen* God had no glory by them there; but, on the contrary, his holy name was profaned, *v. 20*. (1.) It was profaned by the sins of Israel; they were no credit to their profession wherever they

went, but, on the contrary, a reproach to it. The name of God and his holy religion was blasphemed through them, Rom. ii. 24. When those that pretended to be in relation to God, in covenant and communion with him, were found corrupt in their morals, slaves to their appetites and passions, dishonest in their dealings, and false to their words and the trusts reposed in them, the enemies of the Lord had thereby great occasion given them to blaspheme, especially when they quarrelled with their God for correcting them, than which nothing could be more scandalous. (2.) It was profaned by the sufferings of Israel; for from them the enemies of God took occasion to reproach God, as unable to protect his own worshippers and to make good his own grants. They said, in scorn, "These are the people of the land, these wicked people (you see he could not keep them in their obedience to his precepts), these miserable people—you see he could not keep them in the enjoyment of his favours. These are the people that came out of Jehovah's land, they are the very scum of the nations. Are these those that had statutes so righteous whose lives are so unrighteous? Is this the nation that is so much celebrated for a wise and understanding people, and that is said to have God so nigh unto them? Do these belong to that brave, that holy nation, who appear here so vile, so abject?" Thus God sold his people and did not increase his wealth by their price, Ps. xlv. 12. The reproach they were under reflected upon him.

II. Let us now see how God would retrieve his honour, secure it, and advance it, by working a great reformation upon them and then working a great salvation for them. He would have scattered them among the heathen, were it not that he feared the wrath of the enemy, Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. But, though they were unworthy of his compassion, yet he had pity for his own holy name, and a thousand pities it was that that should be trampled upon and abused. He looked with compassion on his own honour, which lay bleeding among the heathen, on that jewel which was trodden into the dirt, which the house of Israel, even in the land of their captivity, had profaned, v. 21. In pity to that God brought them out from the heathen, because their sins were more scandalous there than they had been in their own land. "Therefore I will gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land, v. 24. Not for your sake, because you are worthy of such a favour, for you are most unworthy, but for my holy name's sake (v. 22), that I may sanctify my great name," v. 23. Observe, by the way, God's holy name is his great name. His holiness is his greatness; so he reckons it himself. Nor does any thing make a man truly great but being truly good, and partaking of God's holiness. God will magnify his name as a holy name, for he will sanctify it: I will sanctify my name which

you have profaned. When God performs that which he has sworn by his holiness, then he sanctifies his name. The effect of this shall be very happy: *The heathen shall know that I am the Lord when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes and yours.* When God proves his own holy name, and his saints praise it, then he is sanctified in them, and this contributes to the propagating of the knowledge of him. Observe, 1. God's reasons of mercy are all fetched from within himself; he will bring his people out of Babylon, not for their sakes, but for his own name's sake, because he will be glorified. 2. God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious; therefore he will sanctify his name by the pardon of sin, because it has been profaned by the commission of sin.

25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. 31 Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. 32 Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. 33 Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. 34 And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. 35 And



they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. 36 Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. 37 Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. 38 As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord.

The people of God might be discouraged in their hopes of a restoration by the sense not only of their unworthiness of such a favour (which was answered, in the foregoing verses, with this, that God, in doing it, would have an eye to his own glory, not to their worthiness), but of their unfitness for such a favour, being still corrupt and sinful; and that is answered in these verses, with a promise that God would by his grace prepare and qualify them for the mercy and then bestow it on them. And this was in part fulfilled in that wonderful effect which the captivity in Babylon had upon the Jews there, that it effectually cured them of their inclination to idolatry. But it is further intended as a draught of the covenant of grace, and a specimen of those spiritual blessings with which we are blessed in heavenly things by that covenant. As (*ch. xxxiv.*) after a promise of their return the prophecy insensibly slid into a promise of the coming of Christ, the great Shepherd, so here it insensibly slides into a promise of the Spirit, and his gracious influences and operations, which we have as much need of for our sanctification as we have of Christ's merit for our justification.

I. God here promises that he will work a good work in them, to qualify them for the good work he intended to bring about for them, *v. 25—27*. We had promises to the same purport, *ch. xi. 18—20*. 1. That God would cleanse them from the pollutions of sin (*v. 25*): *I will sprinkle clean water upon you*, which signifies both the blood of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience to purify that and to take away the sense of guilt (as those that were sprinkled with the water of purification were thereby discharged from their ceremonial uncleanness) and the grace of the Spirit sprinkled on the whole soul to purify it from all corrupt inclinations and dispositions, as Naaman was cleansed from his leprosy by dipping in Jordan. Christ

was himself clean, else his blood could not have been cleansing to us; and it is a Holy Spirit that makes us holy: *From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you*. And (*v. 29*) *I will save you from all your uncleanness*. Sin is defiling, idolatry particularly is so; it renders sinners odious to God and burdensome to themselves. When guilt is pardoned, and the corrupt nature sanctified, then we are cleansed from our filthiness, and there is no other way of being saved from it. This God promises his people here, in order to his being sanctified in them, *v. 23*. We cannot sanctify God's name unless he sanctify our hearts, nor live to his glory, but by his grace. 2. That God would give them a *new heart*, a disposition of mind excellent in itself and vastly different from what it was before. God will work an inward change in order to a universal change. Note, All that have an interest in the new covenant, and a title to the new Jerusalem, have a new heart and a new spirit, and these are necessary in order to their walking in *newness of life*. This is that *divine nature* which believers are by the promises made partakers of. 3. That, instead of a *heart of stone*, insensible and inflexible, unapt to receive any divine impressions and to return any devout affections, God would give a *heart of flesh*, a soft and tender heart, that has spiritual senses exercised, conscious to itself of spiritual pains and pleasures, and complying in every thing with the will of God. Note, Renewing grace works as great a change in the soul as the turning of a dead stone into living flesh. 4. That since, besides our inclination to sin, we complain of an inability to do our duty, God will *cause them to walk in his statutes*, will not only show them the way of his statutes before them, but incline them to walk in it, and thoroughly furnish them with wisdom and will, and active powers, for every good work. In order to this he will *put his Spirit within them*, as a teacher, guide, and sanctifier. Note, God does not force men to walk in his statutes by external violence, but causes them to walk in his statutes by an internal principle. And observe what use we ought to make of this gracious power and principle promised us, and put within us: *You shall keep my judgments*. If God will do his part according to the promise, we must do ours according to the precept. Note, The promise of God's grace to enable us for our duty should engage and quicken our constant care and endeavour to do our duty. God's promises must drive us to his precepts as our rule, and then his precepts must send us back to his promises for strength, for without his grace we can do nothing.

II. God here promises that he will take them into covenant with himself. The sum of the covenant of grace we have, *v. 28*. *You shall be my people, and I will be your God*. It is not, "If you will be my people, I will be

your God" (though it is very true that we cannot expect to have God to be to us a God unless we be to him a people), but he has chosen us, and loved us, first, not we him; therefore the condition is of grace, is by promise, as well as the reward; not of merit, not of works: "*You shall be my people; I will make you so; I will give you the nature and spirit of my people, and then I will be your God.*" And this is the foundation and top-stone of a believer's happiness; it is heaven itself, Rev. xxi. 3, 7.

III. He promises that he will bring about all that good for them which the exigence of their case calls for. When they are thus prepared for mercy, 1. Then they shall return to their possessions and be settled again in them (v. 28): *You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.* God will, in bringing them back to it, have an eye not to any merit of theirs, but to the promise made to the fathers; for therefore he gave it to them at first, Deut. vii. 7, 8. Therefore he is gracious, because he has said that he will be so. This shall follow upon the blessed reformation God would work among them (v. 33): "*In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, and so shall have made you meet for the inheritance, I will cause you to dwell in the cities, and so put you in possession of the inheritance.*" This is God's method of mercy indeed, first to part men from their sins, and then to restore them to their comforts. 2. Then they shall enjoy a plenty of all good things. When they are saved from their uncleanness, from their sins which kept good things from them, then *I will call for the corn and will increase it*, v. 29. Plenty comes at God's call, and the plenty he calls for shall be still growing; and when he speaks the word the fruit both of the tree and of the field shall multiply. As the inhabitants multiply the productions shall multiply for their maintenance; for he that sends mouths will send meat. Famine was one of the judgments which they had laboured under, and it had been as much as any a reproach to them, that they should be starved in a land so famed for fruitfulness. But now *I will lay no famine upon you*; and none are under that rod without having it laid on by him. Then they shall receive no more reproach of famine, shall never be again upbraided with that, nor shall it ever be said that God is a Master that keeps his servants to short allowance. Nay, they shall not only be cleared from the reproach of famine, but they shall have the credit of abundance. The land that had long lain desolate in the sight of all that passed by, that looked upon it, some with contempt and some with compassion, shall again be tilled (v. 34), and, having long lain fallow, it will now be the more fruitful. Observe, God will call for the corn and yet they must till the ground for it. Note, Even promised mercies must be laboured for; for the promise is not to super-

sede, but to quicken and encourage our industry and endeavour. And such a blessing will God command on the hand of the diligent that all who pass by shall take notice of it, with wonder, v. 35. They shall say, "*See what a blessed change here is, how this land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, the desert turned again into a paradise.*" Note, God has honours in reserve for his people to be crowned with sufficient to counterbalance the contempt they are now loaded with, and in them he will be honoured. This wonderful increase both of the people of the land and of its products is compared (v. 38) to the large flocks of cattle that are brought to Jerusalem, to be sacrificed at one of the solemn feasts. Even the cities that now lie waste shall be filled with flocks of men, not like the flocks with which the pastures are covered over (Ps. lxxv. 13), but like the holy flock which is brought to the courts of the Lord's house. Note, Then the increase of the numbers of a people is honourable and comfortable indeed when they are all dedicated to God as a holy flock, to be presented to him for living sacrifices. Crowds are a lovely sight in God's temple.

IV. He shows what shall be the happy effects of this blessed change. 1. It shall have a happy effect upon the people of God themselves, for it shall bring them to an ingenuous repentance for their sins (v. 31): *Then shall you remember your own evil ways and shall loathe yourselves.* See here what sin is; it is an abomination, a loathsome thing, that abominable thing which the Lord hates. See what is the first step towards repentance; it is remembering our own evil ways, reflecting seriously upon the sins we have committed and being particular in recapitulating them. We must remember against ourselves not only our gross enormities, our own evil ways, but our defects and infirmities, our doings that were not good, not so good as they should have been; not only our direct violations of the law, but our coming short of it. See what is evermore a companion of true repentance, and that is self-loathing, a holy shame and confusion of face: "*You shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, seeing how loathsome you have made yourselves in the sight of God.*" Self-love is at the bottom of sin, which we cannot but blush to see the absurdity of; but our quarrelling with ourselves is in order to our being, upon good grounds, reconciled to ourselves. And, lastly, see what is the most powerful inducement to an evangelical repentance, and that is a sense of the mercy of God; when God settles them in the midst of plenty, then they shall loathe themselves for their iniquities. Note, The goodness of God should overcome our badness and lead us to repentance. The more we see of God's readiness to receive us into favour upon our repentance the more reason we shall see to be ashamed of ourselves that we could ever



sin against so much love. That heart is hard indeed that will not be thus melted. 2. It shall have a happy effect upon their neighbours, for it shall bring them to a more clear knowledge of God (v. 36): "*Then the heathen that are left round about you, that spoke ignorantly of God (for so all those do that speak ill of him) when they saw the land of Israel desolate, shall begin to know better, and to speak more intelligently of God, being convinced that he is able to rebuild the most desolate cities and to replant the most desolate countries, and that, though the course of his favours to his people may be obstructed for a time, they shall not be cut off for ever. They shall be made to know the truth of divine revelation by the exact agreement which they shall discern between God's word which he has spoken to Israel and his works which he has done for them: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.*" With us saying and doing are two things, but they are not so with God.

V. He proposes these things to them, not as the recompence of their merits, but as the return of their prayers.

1. Let them not think that they have deserved it: *Not for your sakes do I this, be it known to you (v. 22, 32); no, be you ashamed and confounded for your own ways.* God is doing this, all this which he has promised; it is as sure to be done as if it were done already, and present events have a tendency towards it. But then, (1.) They must renounce the merit of their own good works, and be brought to acknowledge that it is not for their sakes that it is done; so, when God brought Israel into Canaan the first time, an express caveat was entered against this thought. Deut. ix. 4—6, *It is not for thy righteousness.* It is not for the sake of any of their good qualities or good deeds, not because God had any need of them, or expected any benefit by them. No, in showing mercy he acts by prerogative, not for our deserts, but for his own honour. See how emphatically this is expressed: *Be it known to you, it is not for your sakes,* which intimates that we are apt to entertain a high conceit of our own merits and are with difficulty persuaded to disclaim a confidence in them. But, one way or other, God will make all his favourites to know and own that it is his grace, and not their goodness, his mercy, and not their merit, that made them so; and that therefore not unto them, not unto them, but unto him, is all the glory due. (2.) They must repent of the sin of their own evil ways. They must own that the mercies they receive from God are not only not merited, but that they are a thousand times forfeited; and therefore they must be so far from boasting of their good works that they must be ashamed and confounded for their evil ways, and then they are best prepared for mercy.

2. Yet let them know that they must desire and expect it (v. 37): *I will yet for this be*

*enquired of by the house of Israel.* God has spoken, and he will do it, and he will be sought unto for it. He requires that his people should seek unto him, and he will incline their hearts to do it, when he is coming towards them in ways of mercy. (1.) They must pray for it, for by prayer God is sought unto, and enquired after. What is the matter of God's promises must be the matter of our prayers. By asking for the mercy promised we must give glory to the donor, express a value for the gift, own our dependence, and put honour upon prayer which God has put honour upon. Christ himself must ask, and then God will give him the heathen for his inheritance, must pray the Father, and then he will send the Comforter; much more must we ask that we may receive. (2.) They must consult the oracles of God, and thus also God is sought unto and enquired after. The mercy must be, not an act of providence only, but a child of promise; and therefore the promise must be looked at, and prayer made for it with an eye of faith fastened upon the promise, which must be both the guide and the ground of our expectations. Both these ways we find God enquired of by Daniel, in the name of the house of Israel, when he was about to do those great things for them; he consulted the oracles of God, for he understood by books, the book of the prophet Jeremiah, both what was to be expected and when; and then he set his face to seek God by prayer, Dan. ix. 2, 3. Note, Our communion with God must be kept up by the word and prayer in all the operations of his providence concerning us and in both he must be enquired of.

#### CHAP. XXXVII.

The threatenings of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, which we had in the former part of this book, were not so terrible, but the promises of their restoration and deliverance for the glory of God, which we have here in the latter part of the book, are as comfortable; and as those were illustrated with many visions and similitudes, for the awakening of a holy fear, so are these, for the encouraging of a humble faith. God had assured them, in the foregoing chapter, that he would gather the house of Israel, even all of it, and would bring them out of their captivity, and return them to their own land; but there were two things that rendered this very unlikely.—I. That they were so dispersed among their enemies, so destitute of all helps and advantages which might favour or further their return, and so dispirited likewise in their own minds; upon all these accounts they are here, in vision, compared to a valley full of the dry bones of dead men, which should be brought together and raised to life. The vision of this we have (ver. 1—10) and the explication of it, with its application to the present case, ver. 11—14. II. That they were so divided among themselves, too much of the old enmity between Judah and Ephraim remaining even in their captivity. But, as to this, by a sign of two sticks made one in the hand of the prophet is foreshown the happy coalition that should be, at their return, between the two nations of Israel and Judah, ver. 15—22. In this there was a type of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Samaritans, in Christ and his church. And so the prophet slides into a prediction of the kingdom of Christ, which should be set up in the world with God's tabernacle in it, and of the glories and graces of that kingdom, ver. 23—28.

THE hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, 2 And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold,

*there were* very many in the open valley; and, lo, *they were* very dry. 3 And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. 4 Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5 Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: 6 And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD. 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. 8 And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but *there was* no breath in them. 9 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. 11 Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. 12 Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, 14 And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD.

Here is, I. The vision of a resurrection from death to life, and it is a glorious resurrection. This is a thing so utterly unknown

to nature, and so contrary to its principles (*a privatione ad habitum non datur regressus*—*from privation to possession there is no return*), that we could have no thought of it but *by the word of the Lord*; and that it is certain by that word that there shall be a general resurrection of the dead some have urged from this vision, "For" (say they) "otherwise it would not properly be made a sign for the confirming of their faith in the promise of their deliverance out of Babylon, as the coming of the Messiah is mentioned for the confirming of their faith touching a former deliverance," Isa. vii. 14. But,

1. Whether it be a confirmation or no, it is without doubt a most lively representation of a threefold resurrection, besides that which it is primarily intended to be the sign of. (1.) The resurrection of souls from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, to a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life, by the power of divine grace going along with the word of Christ, John v. 24, 25. (2.) The resurrection of the gospel church, or any part of it, from an afflicted persecuted state, especially under the yoke of the New-Testament Babylon, to liberty and peace. (3.) The resurrection of the body at the great day, especially the bodies of believers that shall rise to life eternal.

2. Let us observe the particulars of this vision.

(1.) The deplorable condition of these dead bones. The prophet was made, [1.] to take an exact view of them. By a prophetic impulse and a divine power he was, in vision, carried out and set in *the midst of a valley*, probably that plain spoken of *ch. iii. 22*, where God then *talked with him*; and it was *full of bones*, of dead men's bones, not piled up on a heap, as in a charnel-house, but scattered upon the face of the ground, as if some bloody battle had been fought here, and the slain left unburied till all the flesh was devoured or putrefied, and nothing left but the bones, and those disjointed from one another and dispersed. He *passed by them round about*, and he observed not only that they were very many (for there are multitudes gone to the congregation of the dead), but that, *lo, they were very dry*, having been long exposed to the sun and wind. The bones that have been *moistened with marrow* (Job xxi. 24), when they have been any while dead, lose all their moisture, and are dry as dust. The body is now fenced with bones (Job x. 11), but then they will themselves be defenceless. The Jews in Babylon were like those dead and dry bones, unlikely ever to come together, to be so much as a skeleton, less likely to be formed into a body, and least of all to be a living body. However, they lay *unburied in the open valley*, which encouraged the hopes of their resurrection, as of the two witnesses, Rev. xi. 8, 9. The bones of Gog and Magog shall be buried (*ch. xxxix. 12, 15*), for their destruction is final;



but the bones of Israel are in the *open valley*, under the eye of Heaven, for there is *hope in their end*. [2.] He was made to own their case deplorable, and not to be helped by any power less than that of God himself (v. 3): "Son of man, *can these bones live?* Is it a thing likely? Canst thou devise how it should be done? Can thy philosophy reach to put life into dry bones, or thy politics to restore a captive nation?" "No," says the prophet, "I know not how it should be done, but *thou knowest*." He does not say, "They cannot live," lest he should seem to limit the Holy One of Israel; but, "Lord, thou knowest whether they can and whether they shall; if thou dost not put life into them, it is certain that they cannot live." Note, God is perfectly acquainted with his own power and his own purposes, and will have us to refer all to them, and to see and own that his wondrous works are such as could not be effected by any counsel or power but his own.

(2.) The means used for the bringing of these dispersed bones together and these dead and dry bones to life. It must be done by prophecy. Ezekiel is ordered to *prophecy upon these bones* (v. 4 and again v. 9), to *prophecy to the wind*. So he *propheesied as he was commanded*, v. 7, 10. [1.] He must preach, and he did so; and the dead bones lived by a power that went along with the word of God which he preached. [2.] He must pray, and he did so; and the dead bones were made to live in answer to prayer; for a *spirit of life* entered into them. See the efficacy of the word and prayer, and the necessity of both, for the raising of dead souls. God bids his ministers *prophecy upon the dry bones*. Say unto them, *Live*; yea, say unto them, *Live*; and they do as they are commanded, calling to them again and again, *O you dry bones! hear the word of the Lord*. But we call in vain, still they are dead, still they are very dry; we must therefore be earnest with God in prayer for the working of the Spirit with the word: *Come, O breath!* and breathe upon them. God's grace can save souls without our preaching, but our preaching cannot save them without God's grace, and that grace must be sought by prayer. Note, Ministers must faithfully and diligently use the means of grace, even with those that there seems little probability of gaining upon. To prophecy upon dry bones seems as great a penance as to water a dry stick; and yet, whether they will hear or forbear, we must discharge our trust, must *prophecy as we are commanded*, in the name of him who raises the dead and is the fountain of life.

(3.) The wonderful effect of these means. Those that do as they are commanded, as they are commissioned, in the face of the greatest discouragements, need not doubt of success, for God will own and enrich his own appointments. [1.] Ezekiel looked down and prophesied upon the bones in the valley,

and they became human bodies. *First*, That which he had to *say to them* was that God would infallibly raise them to life: *Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, You shall live*, v. 5 and again v. 6. And he that speaks the word will thereby do the work; he that says, *They shall live*, will make them alive: He will *clothe them with skin and flesh* (v. 6), as he did at first, Job x. 11. He that made us so fearfully and wonderfully, and curiously wrought us, can in like manner new-make us, for *his arm is not shortened*. *Secondly*, That which was immediately done for them was that they were moulded anew into shape. We may well suppose it was with great liveliness and vigour that the prophet prophesied, especially when he found what he said begin to take effect. Note, The opening, sealing, and applying of the promises, are the ordinary means of our participation of a new and divine nature. As Ezekiel prophesied in this vision *there was a noise*, a word of command, from heaven, seconding what he said; or it signified the motion of the angels that were to be employed as the ministers of the divine Providence in the deliverance of the Jews, and we read of the *noise of their wings* (Ezek. i. 24) and the *sound of their going*, 2 Sam. v. 24. *And, behold, a shaking*, or commotion, among the bones. Even dead and dry bones begin to move when they are called to hear the word of the Lord. This was fulfilled when, upon Cyrus's proclamation of liberty, those whose spirits God had stirred up began to think of making use of that liberty, and getting ready to be gone. *When there was a noise, behold, a shaking*; when David heard the *sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry-trees* then he *bestirred himself*; then there was a *shaking*. When Paul heard the voice saying, *Why persecutest thou me?* behold, a shaking of the dry bones; he *trembled* and was *astonished*. But this was not all: *The bones came together bone to his bone*, under a divine direction; and, though there is in man a multitude of bones, yet of all the bones of those numerous slain not one was missing, not one missed its way, not one missed its place, but, as it were by instinct, each knew and found its fellow. The dispersed bones came together and the displaced bones were knit together, the divine power supplying that to these dry bones which in a living body *every joint supplies*. Thus shall it be in the resurrection of the dead; the scattered atoms shall be ranged and marshalled in their proper place and order, and *every bone come to his bone*, by the same wisdom and power by which the bones were first *formed in the womb of her that is with child*. Thus it was in the return of the Jews; those that were scattered in several parts of the province of Babylon came to their respective families, and all as it were by consent to the general rendezvous, in order to their return. By degrees *sinews* and *flesh* came upon these bones, and the *skin* *cererea*

them, v. 8. This was fulfilled when the captives got their effects about them, and the men of their place helped them with silver, and gold, and whatever they needed for their remove, Ezra i. 4. But still there was no breath in them; they wanted spirit and courage for such a difficult and hazardous enterprise as this was of returning to their own land. [2.] Ezekiel then looked up and prophesied to the wind, or breath, or spirit, and said, Come, O breath! and breathe upon these slain. As good have been still dry bones as dead bodies: but as for God his work is perfect; he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; therefore breathe upon them that they may live. In answer to this request, the breath immediately came into them, v. 10. Note, the spirit of life is from God; he at first in the creation breathed into man the breath of life, and so he will at last in the resurrection. The dispirited despairing captives were wonderfully animated with resolution to break through all the discouragements that lay in the way of their return and applied themselves to it with all imaginable vigour. And then they stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army; not only living men, but effective men, fit for service in the wars and formidable to all that gave them any opposition. Note, With God nothing is impossible. He can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham and out of dead and dry bones levy an exceedingly great army to fight his battles and plead his cause.

II. The application of this vision to the present calamitous condition of the Jews in captivity: *These bones are the whole house of Israel*, both the ten tribes and the two. See in this what they are and what they shall be.

1. The depth of despair to which they are now reduced, v. 11. They all give up themselves for lost and gone; they say, "Our bones are dried, our strength is exhausted, our spirits are gone, our hope is all lost; every thing we looked for succour and relief from fails us, and we are cut off for our parts." Let who will cherish some hope, we see no ground for any." Note, When troubles continue long, hopes have been often frustrated, and all creature-confidences fail, it is not strange if the spirits sink; and nothing but an active faith in the power, promise, and providence of God will keep them from quite dying away. 2. The height of prosperity to which, notwithstanding this, they shall be advanced: "Therefore, because things have come thus to the last extremity, prophesy to them, and tell them, now is God's time to appear for them. *Jehovah-jireh—in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen*, v. 12—14. 'Tell them,' (1.) "That they shall be brought out of the land of their enemies, where they are as it were buried alive: *I will open your graves*." Those shall be restored, not only whose bones are scattered at the grave's mouth (Ps. cxli. 7), but who are buried in the grave; though the power of the enemy is like the bars of

the pit, which one would think it impossible to break through, strong as death and cruel as the grave, yet it shall be conquered. God can bring his people up from the depths of the earth, Ps. lxxi. 20. (2.) "That they shall be brought into their own land, where they shall live in prosperity: *I will bring you into the land of Israel* (v. 12) and *place you there* (v. 14), and will put my spirit in you and then you shall live." Note, Then God puts spirit in us to good purpose, and so that we shall indeed live, when he puts his Spirit in us. And (lastly) in all this God will be glorified: *You shall know that I am the Lord* (v. 13), that I have spoken it and performed it, v. 14. Note, God's quickening the dead redounds more than any thing to his honour, and to the honour of his word, which he has magnified above all his name, and will magnify more and more by the punctual accomplishment of every tittle of it.

15 The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, 16 Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: 17 And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. 18 And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by these? 19 Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. 20 And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. 21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: 22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: 23 Neither shall they defile themselves any



more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. 24 And David my servant *shall be king* over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. 25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, *even they*, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant Daniel *shall be* their prince for ever. 26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. 27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 28 And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

Here are more exceedingly great and precious promises made of the happy state of the Jews after their return to their own land; but they have a further reference to the kingdom of the Messiah and the glories of gospel-times.

I. It is here promised that Ephraim and Judah shall be happily united in brotherly love and mutual serviceableness; so that whereas, ever since the desertion of the ten tribes from the house of David under Jeroboam, there had been continual feuds and animosities between the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and it is to be feared there had been some clashings between them even in the land of their captivity (Ephraim upon all occasions envying Judah and Judah vexing Ephraim), now it should be no longer, but there should be a coalition between them, and, notwithstanding the old differences that had been between them, they should agree to love one another and to do one another all good offices. This is here illustrated by a sign. The prophet was to take *two sticks*, and write upon one, *For Judah* (including Benjamin, those of the children of Israel that were *his companions*), upon the other, *For Joseph*, including the rest of the tribes, v. 16. These two sticks must be so framed as to fall into *one in his*

*hand*, v. 17. The people took notice of this, and desired him to *tell them the meaning of it*, for they knew he did not play with sticks for his diversion, as children do. Those that would know the meaning should ask the meaning of the word of God which they read and hear, and of the instituted signs by which spiritual and divine things are represented to us; the ministers' *lips* should keep the knowledge hereof and the people should ask it at their mouth, Mal. ii. 7. It is a necessary question for grown people, as well as children, to ask, *What mean you by this service*, by this sign? Exod. xii. 26. The meaning was that Judah and Israel should become *one in the hand of God*, v. 19. 1. They shall be one, one nation, v. 22. They shall have no separate interests, and, consequently, no divided affections. There shall be no mutual jealousies and animosities, no remembrance, no remains, of their former discord. But there shall be a perfect harmony between them, a good understanding one of another, a good disposition one to another, and a readiness to all good offices and services for one another's credit and comfort. They had been two sticks crossing and thwarting one another, nay, beating and bruising one another; but now they shall become one, supporting and strengthening one another. *Vis unita fortior*—Force added to force is proportionally more efficient. Behold, how good and how pleasant a thing it is to see Judah and Israel, that had long been at variance, now dwelling together in unity. Then they shall become acceptable to their God, amiable to their friends, and formidable to their enemies, Isa. xi. 13, 14. 2. They shall be one in *God's hand*; by his power they shall be united, and, being by his hand brought together, his hand shall keep them together, so that they shall not fly off, to be separated again. They shall be one in his hand, for his glory shall be the centre of their unity and his grace the cement of it. In him, in a regard to him and in his service and worship, they shall unite, and so shall become one. Both sides shall agree to put themselves into his hand, and so they shall be one. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt*—Those who agree in a third agree with each other. Note, Those are best united that are one in God's hand, whose union with each other results from their union with Christ and their communion with God through him, Eph. i. 10. *One in us*, John xvii. 21. 3. They shall be one in their return out of captivity (v. 21): *I will take them from among the heathen, and gather them on every side, and bring them together incorporated into one body to their own land*. They shall be one in their separation from the heathen with whom they had mingled themselves: they shall both agree to part from them, and take their affections off from them, and no longer to comply with their

usages, and then they will soon agree to join together in walking according to the rule of God's word. Their having been joint-sufferers will contribute to this blessed comprehension, when they begin to come to themselves and to consider things. Put many pieces of metal together into the furnace, and, when they are melted, they will run all together. It was time for them to strengthen one another when their oppressors were so busy to weaken and ruin them all. Likewise their being joint-sharers in the favour of God, and the great and common deliverance wrought out for them all, should help to unite them. God's loving them all was a good reason why they should love one another. Times of common joy, as well as times of common suffering, should be healing loving times. 4. They shall all be the subjects of one king, and so they shall become one. The Jews, after their return, were under one government, and not divided as formerly. But this certainly looks further, to the kingdom of Christ; he is that one King in allegiance to whom all God's spiritual Israel shall cheerfully unite, and under whose protection they shall all be gathered. All believers unite in *one Lord, one faith, and one baptism*. And the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel church, their becoming one fold under Christ the one great Shepherd, is doubtless the union that is chiefly looked at in this prophecy. By Christ the partition-wall between them was taken down, and the enmity slain, and of them *twain* was made *one new man*, Eph. ii. 14, 15.

II. It is here promised that the Jews shall by their captivity be cured of their inclination to idolatry; this shall be the happy fruit of that affliction, even the taking away of their sin (v. 23): *Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols*, those detestable defiling things, no, nor with any of their former transgressions. Note, When one sin is sincerely parted with all sin is abandoned too, for he that hates sin, as sin, will hate all sin. And those that are cured of their spiritual idolatry, their inordinate affection to the world and the flesh, that no longer make a god of their money or their belly, have a happy blow given to the root of all their transgressions. Two ways God will take to cure them of their idolatry:— 1. By bringing them out of the way of temptation to it: “*I will save them out of all their dwelling-places wherein they have sinned*, because there they met with the occasion of sin and allurements to it.” Note, It is our wisdom to avoid the places where we have been overcome by temptations to sin, not to remain in them, or return to them, but to *save ourselves* out of them, as we would out of infected places; see Zech. ii. 7; Rev. xviii. 4. And it is a great mercy when God, in his providence, *saves us out of the dwelling-places where we have sinned*, and

keeps us from harm by keeping us out of harm's way, in answer to our prayer, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. 2. By changing the disposition of their mind: “*I will cleanse them* (v. 28); that is, I will sanctify them, will work in them an aversion to the pollutions of sin and a complacency in the pleasures of holiness, and then you may be sure they will not defile themselves any more with their idols.” Those whom God has cleansed he will keep clean.

III. It is here promised that they shall be the people of God, as *their God*, and the subjects and sheep of Christ their King and Shepherd. These promises we had before, and they are here repeated (v. 23, 24) for the encouragement of the faith of Israel: *They shall be my people*, to serve me, and *I will be their God*, to save them and to make them happy. *David, my servant, shall be king over them*, to fight their battles, to protect them from injury, and to rule them, and overrule all things that concern them for their good. He shall be *their shepherd*, to guide them and provide for them. Christ is this David, Israel's King of old; and those whom he subdues to himself, and makes willing in the day of his power, he makes to *walk in his judgments and to keep his statutes*.

IV. It is here promised that they shall dwell comfortably, v. 25, 26. They shall dwell in the land of Israel; for where else should Israelites dwell? And many things will concur to make their dwelling agreeable. 1. They shall have it by covenant; they shall come in again upon their old title, by virtue of the grant made unto *Jacob*, God's *servant*. As Christ was David, God's servant, so the church is Jacob, his servant too; and the members of the church shall come in for a share, as born in God's house. He will make a *covenant of peace* with them (v. 26), and in pursuance of that covenant he will *place them, and multiply them*. Note, Temporal mercies are doubly sweet when they come from the promise of the covenant, and not merely from common providence. 2. They shall come to it by prescription. “*It is the land wherein your fathers have dwelt*, and for that reason you cannot but have a special kindness for it, which God will graciously gratify.” It was the inheritance of their ancestors, and therefore shall be theirs. They are *beloved for their fathers' sakes*. 3. They shall have it entailed upon them and the heirs of their body, and shall have their families built up, so that it shall not be lost for want of heirs. *They shall dwell therein* all their time, and never be turned out of possession, and they shall leave it for an inheritance *to their children and their children's children for ever*, who shall enjoy it when they are gone, the prospect of which will be a satisfaction to them. 4. They shall live under a good go-



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vernment, which will contribute very much to the comfort of their lives: *My servant David shall be their prince for ever.* This can be no other than Christ, of whom it was said, when he was brought into the world, *He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever,* Luke i. 33. Note, It is the unspeakable comfort of all Christ's faithful subjects that, as his *kingdom is everlasting*, so he is an *everlasting King*, he lives to reign for ever; and, as sure and as long as he lives and reigns, they shall live and reign also. 5. The charter by which they hold all their privileges is indefeasible. God's covenant with them shall be an *everlasting covenant*; so the covenant of grace is, for it secures to us an everlasting happiness.

V. It is here promised that God will dwell among them; and this will make them dwell comfortably indeed: *I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore; my tabernacle also shall be with them,* v. 26, 27. 1. They shall have the tokens of God's special presence with them and his gracious residence among them. God will in *very deed dwell with them upon the earth*, for where his sanctuary is he is; when they profaned his sanctuary he took it from them (Isa. lxiv. 11), but now that they are purified God will dwell with them again. 2. They shall have opportunity of conversing with God, of hearing from him, speaking to him, and so keeping up communion with him, which will be the comfort of their lives. 3. They shall have the means of grace. By the oracles of God in his tabernacle they shall be made wiser and better, and all their children shall be taught of the Lord. 4. Thus their covenant relation to God shall be improved and the bond of it strengthened: *"I will be their God and they shall be my people, and they shall know it by having my sanctuary among them, and shall have the comfort of it."*

VI. Both God and Israel shall have the honour of this among the heathen, v. 26. "Now the heathen observe how Israel have profaned their own crown by their sins, and God has profaned it by his judgments; but then, when Israel is reformed and God has returned in mercy to them, the very heathen shall be made to know that *the Lord sanctifies Israel*, has a title to them and an interest in them more than other people, because his sanctuary is, and shall be, in the midst of them." Note, God designs the sanctification of those among whom he sets up his sanctuary. And blessed and holy are those who, enjoying the privileges of the sanctuary, give such proofs and evidences of their sanctification that the heathen may know it is no less than the almighty grace of God that sanctifies them. Such have God's sanctuary in the midst of them, the kingdom of God within them, in the principles of the spiritual life, and shall have it so for evermore in the enjoyments of an eternal life.

This chapter, and that which follows it, are concerning Gog and Magog, a powerful enemy to the people of Israel, that should make a formidable descent upon them, and put them into a consternation, but their army should be routed and their design defeated; and this prophecy, it is most probable, had its accomplishment some time after the return of the people of Israel out of their captivity, whether in the struggles they had with the kings of Syria, especially Antiochus Epiphanes, or perhaps in some other way not recorded, we cannot tell. If the sacred history of the Old Testament had reached as far as the prophecy, we should have been better able to understand these chapters, but, for want of that key, we are locked out of the meaning of them. God had by the prophet assured his people of happy times after their return to their own land; but lest they should mistake the promises which related to the kingdom of the Messiah and the spiritual privileges of that kingdom, as if from them they might promise themselves an uninterrupted temporal prosperity, he here tells them, as Christ told his disciples to prevent the like mistake, that in the world they shall have tribulation, but they may be of good cheer, for they shall be victorious at last. This prophecy here of Gog and Magog is without doubt alluded to in that prophecy which relates to the latter days, and which seems to be yet unfulfilled (Rev. xx. 8), that Gog and Magog shall be gathered to battle against the camp of the saints, as the Old-Testament prophecies of the destruction of Babylon are alluded to, Rev. xviii. But, in both, the Old-Testament prophecies had their accomplishment in the Jewish church as the New-Testament prophecies shall have when the time comes in the Christian church. In this chapter we have intermixed, I. The attempt that Gog and Magog should make upon the land of Israel, the vast army they should bring into the field, and their vast preparations (ver. 4-7), their project and design in it (ver. 8-13), God's hand in it, ver. 4. II. The great terror that this should strike upon the land of Israel, ver. 15, 16, 18-20. III. The divine restraint that these enemies should be under, and the divine protection that Israel should be under, ver. 2-4, and again ver. 14. IV. The defeat that should be given to those enemies by the immediate hand of God (ver. 21-23), which we shall hear more of in the next chapter.

AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, 3 And say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: 4 And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: 5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: 6 Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee. 7 Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. 8 After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all

of them. 9 Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee. 10 Thus saith the Lord God; It shall also come to pass, *that* at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: 11 And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwall'd villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, 12 To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places *that are now* inhabited, and upon the people *that are* gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land. 13 Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?

The critical expositors have enough to do here to enquire out Gog and Magog. We cannot pretend either to add to their observations or to determine their controversies. Gog seems to be the king and Magog the kingdom; so that Gog and Magog are like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Some think they find them afar off, in Scythia, Tartary, and Russia. Others think they find them nearer the land of Israel, in Syria, and Asia the Less. Ezekiel is appointed to prophesy against Gog, and to tell him that *God is against him*, v. 2, 3. Note, God does not only see those that are now the enemies of his church and set himself against them, but he foresees those that will be so and lets them know by his word that he is against them too, and yet is pleased to make use of them to serve his own purposes, for the glory of his own name; *'surely their wrath shall praise him, and the remainder thereof he will restrain'*, Ps. lxxvi. 10. Let us observe here,

I. The confusion which God designed to put this enemy to. It is remarkable that this is put first in the prophecy; before it is foretold that God will *bring him forth* against Israel it is foretold that God will *put hooks into his jaws and turn him back* (v. 4), that they might have assurance of their deliverance before they had the prospect given them of their danger. Thus tender is God of the comfort of his people, thus careful that they may not be frightened; even before the trouble begins he tells them it will end well.

II. The undertaking which he designed to engage him in, in order to this defeat and disappointment. 1. The nations that shall be confederate in this enterprise against Israel are many, and great, and mighty (v. 5, 6), *Persia, Ethiopia, &c.* Antiochus had an army made up of all the nations here named, and many others. These people had been at variance with one another, and yet in combination against Israel. How are those increased that trouble God's people! 2. They are well furnished with arms and ammunition, and bring a good train of artillery into the field—*horses and horsemen* (v. 4) bravely equipped with all sorts of armour, bucklers and shields for defence, and all handling swords for offence. Orders are given to make all imaginable preparation for this expedition (v. 7): *"Be thou prepared, and do thou prepare."* See what warlike preparations thou hast already in store, and, lest that should not suffice, make further preparation, *thou and all thy company.* Let Gog himself be a guard to the rest of the confederates. As commander-in-chief, let him engage to take care of them and their safety; let him pass his word for their security, and take them under his particular protection. The leaders of an army, instead of exposing their soldiers needlessly and presumptuously, and throwing away their lives upon desperate undertakings, should study to be a guard to them, and, whenever they send them forth in danger, should contrive to support and cover them. This call to prepare seems to be ironical—*Do thy worst*, but I will turn thee back; like that Isa. viii. 9. *Gird yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces.* 3. Their design is against the mountains of Israel (v. 8), against the land that is brought back from the sword. It is not long since it was harassed with the sword of war, and it has been always wasted, more or less, with one judgment or other; it is but newly gathered out of many people, and brought forth out of the nations; it has enjoyed comparatively but a short breathing-time, has scarcely recovered any strength since it was brought down by war and captivity; and therefore its neighbours need not fear its being too great, nay, and therefore it is very barbarous to pick a quarrel with it so soon. It is a people that dwell safely, all of them, in unwall'd villages, very secure, and having neither bars nor gates, v. 11. It is a certain sign that they intend no mischief to their neighbours, for they fear no mischief from them. It cannot be thought that those will offend others who do not take care to defend themselves; and this aggravates the sin of these invaders. It is base and barbarous to devise evil against thy neighbour while he dwells securely by thee, and has no distrust of thee, Prov. iii. 29. But see here how the clouds return after the rain in this world, and what little reason we have ever to be secure till we come to heaven. It is not long since



Israel was brought back from the sword of one enemy, and behold the sword of another is drawn against it. Former troubles will not excuse us from further troubles; but when we think we have *put off the harness*, at least for some time, by a fresh and sudden alarm we may be called to *gird it on again*; and therefore we must never boast nor be off our guard. 4. That which the enemy has in view, in forming this project, is to enrich himself and to make himself master, not of the country, but of the wealth of it, to spoil and plunder it, and make a prey of it: *At the same time that God intends to bring this matter about things shall come into the mind of this enemy, and he shall think an evil thought*, v. 10. Note, All the mischief men do, and particularly the mischief they do to the church of God, arises from evil thoughts that come into their mind, ambitious thoughts, covetous thoughts, spiteful thoughts against those that are good, for the sake of their goodness. It came into Antiochus's mind what a singular people these religious Jews were, and how their worship witnessed against and condemned the idolatries of their neighbours, and therefore, in enmity to their religion, he would plague them. It came into his mind what a wealthy people they were, that they had *gotten cattle and goods in the midst of the land* (v. 12), and withal how weak they were, how unable to make any resistance, how easy it would be to carry off what they had, and how much glory this rapine would add to his victorious sword; these things coming into his mind, and one evil thought drawing on another, he came at last to this resolve (v. 11, 12): "*I will go up to the land of unvalled villages*; yea, that that I will; it will cost me nothing to make them all my own. I will go and disturb those that are at rest, without giving them any notice, not to crush their growing greatness, or chastise their insolence, or make reprisals upon them for any wrong they have done us (they had none of these pretences to make war upon them), but purely to take a spoil and to take a prey" (v. 12), in open defiance to all the laws of justice and equity, as much as the highwayman's killing the traveller that he may take his money. These were the thoughts that came into the mind of this wicked prince, and God knew them; nay, he knew them before they came into his mind, for he *understands our thoughts afar off*, Ps. cxxxix. 2. 5. According to the project thus formed he pours in all his forces upon the land of Israel, and finds those that are ready to come in to his assistance with the same prospects (v. 9): "*Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm*, with all the force, and fury, and fierceness imaginable, and *thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land*, to darken it, and to threaten it, *thou and not only all thy bands*, all the force thou canst bring into the field, but *many people with thee*" (such as are spoken of v. 13), "*Sheba*

*and Dedan*, the Arabians and the Edomites, *and the merchants of Tarshish*, of Tyre and Sidon and other maritime cities, they and their *young lions* that are greedy of spoil and live upon it, *shall say*, *Hast thou come to take the spoil of this land?*" Yes he has; and therefore they wish him success. Or perhaps they envy him, or grudge it to him. "*Hast thou come for riches who art thyself so rich already?*" Or, knowing that God was on Israel's side, they thus ridicule his attempts, foreseeing that they would be baffled and that he would be disappointed of the prey he promised himself. Or, if he come to *take the prey*, they will come and join with him, and add to his forces. When Lysias, who was general of Antiochus's army, came against the Jews, the neighbouring nations joined with him (1 Mac. iii. 41), to share in the guilt, in hopes to share in the prey. *When thou sawest a thief then thou consentedst with him*.

14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? 15 And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: 16 And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. 17 Thus saith the Lord God; *Art thou* he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days *many* years that I would bring thee against them? 18 And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, *that my fury shall come up in my face*. 19 For in my jealousy, *and in the fire of my wrath* have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; 20 So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep

places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. 21 And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother. 22 And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that *are* with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. 23 Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that *I am* the LORD.

This latter part of the chapter is a repetition of the former; the dream is doubled, for the thing is certain and to be very carefully regarded.

I. It is here again foretold that this spiteful enemy should make a formidable descent upon the land of Israel (v. 15): "*Thou shalt come out of the north parts* (Syria lay on the north of Canaan) *with a mighty army, shalt come like a cloud, and cover the land of my people Israel, v. 16. These words (v. 14), When my people Israel dwell safely, shalt thou not know it?* may be taken two ways:—1. As intimating his inducements to this attempt. "Thou shalt have intelligence brought thee how securely, and therefore how carelessly, the people of Israel dwell, which shall give rise to thy project against them; for when thou knowest not only what a rich, but what an easy prey they are likely to be, thou wilt soon determine to fall upon them." Note, God's providence is to be acknowledged in the occasion, the small occasion perhaps, that is given, and that not designedly neither, to those first thoughts from which great enterprises take their original. God, to bring about his own purposes, lets men know that which yet he knows they will make a bad use of, as here. Or, 2. As intimating his disappointment in this attempt, which here, as before, the prophecy begins with: "*When my people Israel dwell safely, not in their own apprehension only, but in reality, forasmuch as they dwell safely under the divine protection, shalt not thou be made to know it by the fruitlessness of thy endeavours to destroy them?* Thou shalt soon find that there is *no enchantment against Jacob, that no weapon formed against them shall prosper*; thou shalt know to thy cost, shalt know to thy shame, that though they have no walls, nor bars, nor gates, they have God himself, *a wall of fire, round about them, and that he who touches them touches the apple of his eye*; whosoever meddles with them meddles to his own hurt. And it is for the demonstrating of this to all the world that God will bring this mighty enemy against his people. Those

that *gathered themselves against Israel* said, *Let us take the spoil and take the prey, but they knew not the thoughts of the Lord, Mic. iv. 11, 12. I will bring thee against my land.* This is strange news, that God will not only permit his enemies to come against his own children, but will himself bring them; but, if we understand what he aims at, we shall be well reconciled even to this: it is "*that the heathen may know me to be the only living and true God when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog!* that is, in thy defeat and destruction *before their eyes*, that all the nations may see, and say, *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, that rides on the heavens for the help of his people.*" Note, God brings his people into danger and distress that he may have the honour of bringing about their deliverance, and suffers the enemies of his church to prevail awhile, though they profane his name by their sin, that he may have the honour of prevailing at last and sanctifying his own name in their ruin. Now it is said, This shall be *in the latter days*, namely, in the latter days of the Old-Testament church; so the mischief that Antiochus did to Israel was; but in the latter days of the New-Testament church another like enemy should arise, that should in like manner be defeated. Note, Effectual securities are treasured up in the word of God against the troubles and dangers the church may be brought into a great while hence, even in the latter days.

II. Reference is herein had to the predictions of the former prophets (v. 17): "*Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time, of whom Moses spoke in his prophecy of the latter days (Deut. xxxii. 43, He will render vengeance to his adversaries), and David, Ps. ix. 15 (The heathen are sunk down into the pit that they made) and often elsewhere in the Psalms?* This is the leviathan of whom Isaiah spoke (Isa. xxvii. 1), that congress of the nations of which Joel spoke, Joel iii. 1. Many of the prophets had perhaps spoken particularly of this event, though it be not written, as they all had spoken and written too that which is applicable to it. Note, There is an amiable admirable harmony and agreement between the Lord's prophets, though they lived in several ages, for they were all guided by one and the same Spirit.

III. It is here foretold that this furious formidable enemy should be utterly cut off in this attempt upon Israel, and that it should issue in his own ruin. This is supposed by many to have its accomplishment in the many defeats given by the Maccabees to the forces of Antiochus and the remarkable judgments of God executed upon his own person, for he died of sore diseases. But these things are here foretold, as usual, in figurative expressions, which we are not to look for the literal accomplishment of, and yet they might be fulfilled nearer the letter than we know of. 1. God will be highly displeased with this



bold invader : *When he comes up in pride and anger against the land of Israel*, and thinks to carry all before him with a high hand, then *God's fury shall come up in his face*, which is an allusion to the manner of men, whose colour rises in their faces when some high affront is offered them and they are resolved to show their resentment of it, v. 18. God will speak against them in his *jealousy* for his people and in the *fire of his wrath* against his and their enemies, v. 19. See how God's permitting sin, his laying occasions of sin before men, and his making use of it to serve his own purposes, consist with his hatred of sin and his displeasure against it. God *brings this enemy against his land*, letting him know what an easy prey it might be and determining thereby to glorify himself ; and yet, *when he comes against the land*, God's *fury comes up and he speaks to him in the fire of his wrath*. If any ask, Why does he thus find fault ? for who has resisted his will ? It is easy to answer, *Nay, but, O man ! who art thou that repliest against God ?* 2. His forces shall be put into the greatest confusion and consternation imaginable (v. 19) : *There shall be a great shaking of them in the land of Israel*, a universal concussion (v. 20), such as shall affect the *fishes and fowls, the beasts and creeping things*, and much more *the men that are upon the face of the earth*, who sooner receive impressions of fear. There shall be such an earthquake as shall *throw down the mountains*, those natural heights, and the *steep places, towers and walls*, those artificial heights ; they shall all *fall to the ground*. Some understand this of the fright which the land of Israel should be put into by the fury of the enemy. But it is rather to be understood of the fright which the enemy should be put into by the wrath of God ; all those things which they both raise themselves and stay themselves upon shall be shaken down, and their hearts shall fail them. 3. He shall be routed and utterly ruined ; both earth and heaven shall be armed against him. (1.) The earth shall muster up its forces to destroy him. If the people of Israel have not strength and courage to resist him, God will *call for a sword against him*, v. 21. And he has swords always at command, that are *bathed in heaven*, Isa. xxxv. 5. Throughout all the mountains of Israel, where he hoped to meet with spoil to enrich him, he shall meet with swords to destroy him, and, rather than fail, *every man's sword shall be against his brother*, as in the day of *Midian*, Ps. lxxxiii. 9. The great men of Syria shall undermine and overthrow one another, shall accuse one another, shall fight duels with one another. Note, God can, and often does, make the destroyers of his people to be their own destroyers and the destroyers of one another. However, he will himself be their destroyer, will take the work into his own hand, that it may be done thoroughly (v. 22) : *I will plead against him with pesti-*

*lence and blood*. Note, Whom God acts against he pleads against ; he shows them the ground of his controversy with them, that their mouths may be stopped, and he may be clear when he judges. (2.) The artillery of heaven shall also be drawn out against them : *I will rain upon him an overflowing rain*, v. 22. He comes like a storm upon Israel, v. 9. But God will come like a storm upon him, will rain upon him *great hailstones* as upon the Canaanites (Josh. x. 11), fire and brimstone as upon Sodom, and a *horrible tempest*, Ps. xi. 6. Thus the Gog and Magog in the New Testament shall be devoured with *fire from heaven*, and cast into the *lake of brimstone*, Rev. xx 9, 10. That will be the everlasting portion of all the impenitent implacable enemies of God's church and people. 4. God, in all this, will be glorified. The end he aimed at (v. 16) shall be accomplished (v. 23) : *Thus will I magnify myself and sanctify myself*. Note, In the destruction of sinners God makes it to appear that he is a great and holy God, and he will do so to eternity. And, if men do not magnify and sanctify him as they ought, he will magnify himself, and sanctify himself ; and this we should desire and pray for daily, *Father, glorify thy own name*.

## CHAP. XXXIX.

This chapter continues and concludes the prophecy against Gog and Magog, in whose destruction God crowns his favour to his people Israel, which shines very brightly after the scattering of that black cloud in the close of this chapter. Here is, I. An express prediction of the utter destruction of Gog and Magog, agreeing with what we had before, ver. 1-7. II. An illustration of the vastness of that destruction, in three consequences of it: the burning of their weapons (ver. 8-10), the burying of their slain (ver. 11-16), and the feasting of the fowls with the dead bodies of those that were unburied, ver. 17-22. III. A declaration of God's gracious purposes concerning his people Israel, in this and his other providences concerning them, and a promise of further mercy that he had yet in store for them, ver. 23-29.

**T**HEREFORE, thou son of man, this prophecy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord God ; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal : 2 And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel : 3 And I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand. 4 Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee : I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. 5 Thou shalt fall upon the open field : for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God. 6 And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell care-

lessly in the isles: and they shall know that I *am* the LORD. 7 So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not *let them* pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

This prophecy begins as that before (*ch. xxxviii. 3, 4, I am against thee, and I will turn thee back*); for there is need of line upon line, both for the conviction of Israel's enemies and the comfort of Israel's friends. Here, as there, it is foretold that God will bring this enemy *from the north parts*, as formerly the Chaldeans were fetched from the north, Jer. i. 14 (*Omne malum ab aquilone—Every evil comes from the north*), and, long after, the Roman empire was overrun by the northern nations, that he will bring him *upon the mountains of Israel* (v. 2), first as a place of temptation, where the measures of his iniquity shall be filled up, and then as a place of execution, where his ruin shall be completed. And that is it which is here enlarged upon. 1. His soldiers shall be disarmed and so disabled to carry on their enterprise. Though the men of might may *find their hands*, yet to what purpose, when they find it is put out of their power to do mischief, when God shall smite their *bow out of their left hand* and their *arrow out of their right*? v. 3. Note, 'The weapons formed against Zion shall not prosper. 2. He and the greatest part of his army shall be slain in the field of battle (v. 4): *Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel*; there they sinned, and there they shall perish, even upon the holy mountains of Israel, for there *broke he the arrows of the bow*, Ps. lxxvi. 3. The mountains of Israel shall be moistened, and fattened, and made fruitful, with the blood of the enemies. "Thou shalt *fall upon the open field* (v. 5) and shalt not be able even there to make thy escape." Even upon the mountains he shall not find a pass that he shall be able to maintain, and upon the open field he shall not find a road that he shall be able to make his escape by. He and *his bands*; his regular troops, and the people that are *with him* that follow the camp to share in the plunder, shall all *fall with him*. Note, Those that *cast in their lot* among wicked people (Prov. i. 14), that they *may have one purse* with them, must expect to *take their lot with them*, and fare as they fare, taking the worse with the better. There shall be such a general slaughter made that but a *sixth part shall be left* (v. 2), the other five shall all be cut off. Never was army so totally routed as this. And, for its greater infamy and reproach, their bodies shall be a feast to the birds of prey, v. 4. Compare v. 17, *Thou shalt fall, for I have spoken it*. Note, Rather shall the most illustrious princes (Antiochus was called *Epiphanes—the illustrious*) and

the most numerous armies *fall to the ground* than any word of God; for he that has spoken will *make it good*. 3. His country also shall be made desolate: *I will send a fire on Magog* (v. 6) and *among those that dwell carelessly, or confidently, in the isles*, that is, the nations of the Gentiles. He designed to destroy the land of Israel, but shall not only be defeated in that design, but shall have his own destroyed by some fire, some consuming judgment or other. Note, 'Those who invade other people's rights justly lose their own. 4. God will by all this advance the honour of his own name, (1.) Among his people Israel; they shall hereby know more of God's name, of his power and goodness, his care of them, his faithfulness to them. His providence concerning them shall lead them into a better acquaintance with him; every providence should do so, as well as every ordinance: *I will make my holy name known in the midst of my people*. In Judah is God known; but those that know much of God should know more of him; we should especially increase in the knowledge of his name as a holy name. They shall know him as a God of perfect purity and rectitude and that hates all sin, and then it follows, *I will not let them pollute my holy name any more*. Note, Those that rightly know God's holy name will not dare to profane it; for it is through ignorance of it that men make light of it and make bold with it. And this is God's method of dealing with men, first to enlighten their understandings, and by that means to influence the whole man; he first makes us to know his holy name, and so keeps us from polluting it and engages us to honour it. And this is here the blessed effect of God's glorious appearances on the behalf of his people. Thus he completes his favours, thus he sanctifies them, thus he makes them blessings indeed; by them he instructs his people and reforms them. *When the Almighty scattered kings for her she was white as snow in Salmon*, Ps. lxviii. 14. (2.) Among the heathen; those that never knew it, or would not own it, shall know that *I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel*. They shall be made to know by dearbought experience that he is a God of power, and his people's God and Saviour; and it is in vain for the greatest potentates to contend with him; none ever hardened their heart against him and prospered.

8 Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord GOD; this *is* the day whereof I have spoken. 9 And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the hand-staves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire



seven years: 10 So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down *any* out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the *noses* of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call *it* The valley of Hamon-gog. 12 And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. 13 Yea, all the people of the land shall bury *them*; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord God. 14 And they shall sever out men of continual employment, passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it: after the end of seven months shall they search. 15 And the passengers *that* pass through the land, when *any* seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. 16 And also the name of the city *shall be* Hamonah. Thus shall they cleanse the land. 17 And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, *even* a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood. 18 Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. 19 And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. 20 Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God. 21 And I will set my glory among the heathen,

and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. 22 So the house of Israel shall know that I *am* the Lord their God from that day and forward.

Though this prophecy was to have its accomplishment in the latter days, yet it is here spoken of as if it were already accomplished, because it is certain (v. 8): "*Behold it has come, and it is done*"; it is as sure to be done when the time shall come as if it were done already; *this is the day whereof I have long and often spoken*, and, though it has been long in coming, yet at length it *has come*." Thus it was said unto John (Rev. xxi. 6), *It is done*. To represent the routing of the army of Gog as very great, here are three things specified as the consequences of it. It was God himself that gave the defeat; we do not find that the people of Israel drew a sword or struck a stroke: but,

I. They shall *burn their weapons*, their bows and arrows, which *fell out of their hands* (v. 3), *their shields and bucklers*, their javelins, spears, leading staves, truncheons, and half-pikes, every thing that is combustible. They shall not lay them up in their armouries, nor reserve them for their own use, lest they should be tempted to put a confidence in them, but they shall burn them; not all at once, for a bonfire (to what purpose would be that waste?) but as they had occasion to use them for fuel in their houses, instead of other fire-wood, so that they should have no occasion to *take wood out of the field or forests for seven years together* (v. 10), such vast quantities of weapons shall there be left upon the open field where the enemy fell, and in the roads which they passed in their flight. The weapons were dry and fitter for fuel than green wood; and, by saving the wood in their coppices and forests, they gave it time to grow. Though the mountains of Israel produce plenty of all good things, yet it becomes the people of Israel to be good husbands of their plenty and to save what they can for the benefit of those that come after them, as Providence shall give them opportunity to do so. We may suppose that when those who dwelt in the cities of Israel came forth to *spoil those who spoiled them*, and make reprisals upon them, they found upon them silver, and gold, and ornaments; yet no mention is made of any thing particularly that they converted to their own use but the wood of the weapons for fuel, which is one of the necessities of human life, to teach us to think it enough if we be well supplied with those, though we have but little of the delights and gaieties of it and of those things which we may very well live without. And every time they put fuel to the fire, and warmed themselves at it, they would be put

in mind of the number and strength of their enemies, and the imminent peril they were in of falling into their hands, which would help to enlarge their hearts in thankfulness to that God who had so wonderfully, so seasonably, delivered them. As they sat by the fire with their children about them (their fire-side), they might from it take occasion to tell them what great things God had done for them.

II. They shall bury their dead. Usually, after a battle, when many are slain, the enemy desire time to bury their own dead. But here the slaughter shall be so general that there shall not be a sufficient number of the enemies left alive to bury the dead. And, besides, the slain lie so dispersed on the mountains of Israel that it would be a work of time to find them out; and therefore it is left to the house of Israel to bury them as a piece of triumph in their overthrow. 1. A place shall be appointed on purpose for the burying of them, *the valley of the passengers, on the east of the sea*, either the salt sea or the sea of Tiberias, a valley through which there was great passing and repassing of travellers between Egypt and Chaldea. There shall be such a multitude of dead bodies, putrefying above ground, with such a loathsome stench, that the travellers who go that way shall be forced to *stop their noses*. See what vile bodies ours are; when the soul has been a little while from them the smell of them becomes offensive, no smell more nauseous or more noxious. There therefore where the greatest number lay slain shall the burying-place be appointed. In the place where the tree falls there let it lie. And it shall be called, *The valley of Hamon-gog*, that is, *of the multitude of Gog*; for that was the thing which was in a particular manner to be had in remembrance. How numerous the forces of the enemy were which God defeated and destroyed for the defence of his people Israel! 2. A considerable time shall be spent in burying them, no less than *seven months* (v. 12), which is a further intimation that the *slain of the Lord* in this action should be many and that great care should be taken by the house of Israel to leave none unburied, that so *they might cleanse the land* from the ceremonial pollution it contracted by the lying of so many dead corpses unburied in it, for the prevention of which it was appointed that those who were *hanged on a tree* should be *speedily taken down and buried*, Deut. xxi. 23. 'This is an intimation that times of eminent deliverances should be times of reformation. The more God has done for the saving of a land from ruin the more the inhabitants should do for the cleansing of the land from sin. 3. Great numbers shall be employed in this work: *All the people of the land* shall be ready to lend a helping hand to it, v. 13. Note, Every one should contribute the utmost he can in his place towards the cleansing of

the land from the pollutions of it, and from every thing that is a reproach to it. Sin is a common enemy, which every man should take up arms against. *In publico discrimine unusquisque homo miles est*—*In the season of public danger every man becomes a soldier*. And whoever shall assist in this work it shall be to them a renown; though the office of grave-makers, or common scavengers of the country, seem but mean, yet, when it is for the cleansing and purifying of the land from dead works, it shall be mentioned to their honour. Note, Acts of humanity add much to the renown of God's Israel; it is a credit to religion when those that profess it are ready to every good work; and a good work it is to bury the dead, yea, though they be strangers and enemies to the commonwealth of Israel, for even they shall rise again. *It shall be a renown to them in the day when God will be glorified*. Note, It is for the glory of God when his Israel do that which adorns their profession; others will see their good works and glorify their Father, Matt. v. 16. And when God is honoured he will put honour upon his people. His glory is their renown. 4. Some particular persons shall make it their business to search out the dead bodies, or any part of them that should remain unburied. *The people of the land* will soon grow weary of burying the pollutions of the country, and therefore they shall appoint *men of continual employment*, that shall apply themselves to it and do nothing else till the land be thoroughly cleansed; for, otherwise, that which is every one's work would soon become nobody's work. Note, Those that are engaged in public work, especially for the cleansing and reforming of a land, ought to be *men of continual employments*, men that will stick to what they undertake and go through with it, men that will apply themselves to it; and those that will do good according to their opportunities will find themselves *continually employed*. 5. Even the passengers shall be ready to give information to those whose business it is to cleanse the land of what public nuisances they meet with, which call for their assistance. Those that *pass through the land*, though they will not stay to bury the dead themselves, lest they should contract a ceremonial pollution, will yet give notice of those that they find unburied. If they but discover a bone, they will *set up a sign*, that *the buriers may come and bury it*, and that, till it is buried, others may take heed of touching it, for which reason their sepulchres among the Jews were whitened, that people might keep at a distance from them. Note, When good work is to be done every one should lend a hand to further it, even the passengers themselves, who must not think themselves unconcerned, in a common calamity, or a common iniquity, to put a stop to it. Those whose work it is to cleanse the land must not



countenance any thing in it that is defiling; though it were not the body, but only *the bone, of a man*, that was found unburied, they must encourage those who will give information of it (private information, by a sign, concealing the informer), that they may take it away, and bury it out of sight. Nay, *after the end of seven months*, which was allowed them for this work, when all is taken away that appeared at first view, *they shall search for more*, that what is hidden may be brought to light; they shall *search out iniquity till they find none*. In memory of this they shall give a new name to their city. It shall be called *Hamonah—The multitude*. O what a multitude of our enemies have we of this city buried! *Thus shall they cleanse the land*, with all this care, with all this pains, v. 16. Note, After conquering there must be cleansing. Moses appointed those Israelites that had been employed in the war with the Midianites to *purify themselves*, Num. xxxi. 24. Having received special favours from God, *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness*.

III. The birds and beasts of prey shall rest upon the carcases of the slain while they remain unburied and it shall be impossible to prevent them, v. 17, &c. We find a great slaughter represented by this figure, Rev. xix. 17, &c., which is borrowed from this.

1. There is a general invitation given, v. 17. It is *to the fowl of every wing and to every beast of the field*, from the greatest to the least, that preys upon carcases, from the eagle to the raven, from the lion to the dog; let them all gather themselves on every side; here is meat enough for them, and they are all welcome. Let them come to God's sacrifice, to his feast; so the margin reads it. Note, The judgments of God, executed upon sin and sinners, are both a sacrifice and a feast, a sacrifice to the justice of God and a feast to the faith and hope of God's people. When God *broke the head of leviathan*, he gave him to be *meat to Israel*, Ps. lxxiv. 14. *The righteous shall rejoice as at a feast when he sees the vengeance*, and shall *wash his foot*, as at a feast, *in the blood of the wicked*. This sacrifice is *upon the mountains of Israel*; these are the high places, the altars, where God has been dishonoured by the idolatries of the people, but where he will now glorify himself in the destruction of his enemies.

2. There is great preparation made: They shall *eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of the princes of the earth*, v. 18, 19. (1.) It is the flesh and blood of men that they shall be treated with. This has sometimes been an instance of the rebellion of the inferior creatures against man their master, which is an effect of his rebellion against God his Maker. (2.) It is the flesh and blood of great men, here called *rams*, and *bullocks*, and *great goats*, *all of them fatlings of Bashan*. It is the blood of the *princes of the earth* that they shall regale themselves

with. What a mortification is this to the princes of the blood, as they call themselves, that God can make that blood, that royal blood, which swells their veins, a feast for the birds and beasts of prey! (3.) It is the flesh and blood of wicked men, the enemies of God's church and people, that they are invited to. They had accounted the Israel of God as *sheep for the slaughter*, and now they shall themselves be so accounted; they had thus used the *dead bodies of God's servants* (Ps. lxxix. 2), or would have done, and now it shall come upon themselves.

3. They shall all be fed, they shall all be feasted to the full (v. 19, 20): "*You shall eat fat, and drink blood*, which are satiating surfeiting things. The sacrifice is great and the feast upon the sacrifice is accordingly: *You shall be filled at my table*. Note, God keeps a table for the inferior creatures; he *provides food for all flesh*. The eyes of all wait upon him, and he *satisfies their desires*, for he keeps a plentiful table. And if the birds and beasts shall be filled at God's table, which he has prepared for them, much more shall his children be abundantly satisfied with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple. They shall be filled with *horses and chariots*; that is, those who ride in the chariots, *mighty men and men of war*, who triumphed over nations, are now themselves triumphed over by the *ravens of the valley* and the *young eagles*, Prov. xxx. 17. They thought to make an easy prey of God's Israel, and now they are themselves an easy prey to the birds and beasts. See how *evil pursues sinners* even after death. This exposing of their bodies to be a prey is but a type and sign of those terrors which, after death, shall prey upon their consciences (which the poetical fictions represented by a vulture continually pecking at the heart), and this shame is but an earnest of the everlasting shame and contempt they shall rise to.

IV. This shall redound very much both to the glory of God and to the comfort and satisfaction of his people. 1. It shall be much for the honour of God, for the heathen shall hereby be made to know that he is the Lord (v. 21): *All the heathen shall see and observe my judgments that I have executed*, and thereby my *glory shall be set among them*. This principle shall be admitted and established among them more than ever, that the God of Israel is a great and glorious God. He is known to be so even among the heathen, that have not, or read not, his written word, by the judgments which he executes. 2. It shall be much for the satisfaction of his people; for they shall hereby be made to know that he is their God (v. 22): *The house of Israel shall know*, abundantly to their comfort, that *I am the Lord their God from that day and forward*. (1.) He will be so from that day and forward. God's present mercies are pledges and assurances of further

mercies. If God evidence to us that he is our God he assures us that he will never leave us. *This God is our God for ever and ever.* (2.) They shall know it with more satisfaction from that day and forward. They had sometimes been ready to question whether the Lord was with them or no; but the events of this day shall silence their doubts, and, the matter being thus settled and made clear, it shall not be doubted of for the future. As boasting in themselves is hereby for ever excluded, so boasting in God is hereby for ever secured.

23 And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. 24 According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. 25 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; 26 After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. 27 When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; 28 Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. 29 Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God.

This is the conclusion of the whole matter going before, and has reference not only to the predictions concerning Gog and Magog, but to all the prophecies of this book concerning the captivity of the house of Israel, and then concerning their restoration and return out of their captivity.

1. God will let the heathen know the meaning of his people's troubles, and rectify the mistake of those concerning them who took occasion from the troubles of Israel to reproach the God of Israel, as unable to pro-

tect them and untrue to his covenant with them. When God, upon their reformation and return to him, turned again their captivity, and brought them back to their own land, and, upon their perseverance in their reformation, wrought such great salvations for them as that from the attempts of Gog upon them, then it would be made to appear, even to the heathen that would but consider and compare things, that there was no ground at all for their reflection, that Israel went into captivity, not because God could not protect them, but because they had by sin forfeited his favour and thrown themselves out of his protection (v. 23, 24): *The heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity*, that iniquity which they learned from the heathen their neighbours, *because they trespassed against God.* That was the true reason why God hid his face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies. It was according to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions. Now the evincing of this will not only silence their reflections on God, but will redound greatly to his honour; when the troubles of God's people are over, and we see the end of them, we shall better understand them than we did at first. And it will appear much for the glory of God when the world is made to know, 1. That God punishes sin even in his own people, because he hates it most in those that are nearest and dearest to him, Amos iii. 2. It is the praise of justice to be impartial. 2. That, when God gives up his people for a prey, it is to correct them and reform them, not to gratify their enemies, Isa. x. 7; xlii. 24. Let not them therefore exalt themselves. 3. That no sooner do God's people humble themselves under the rod than he returns in mercy to them.

II. God will give his own people to know what great favour he has in store for them notwithstanding the troubles he had brought them into (v. 25, 26): *Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob.*

1. Why now? Now God will have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, (1.) Because it is time for him to stand up for his own glory, which suffers in their sufferings: *Now will I be jealous for my holy name*, that that may no longer be reproached. (2.) Because now they repent of their sins: *They have borne their shame, and all their trespasses.* When sinners repent, and take shame to themselves, God will be reconciled and put honour upon them. It is particularly pleasing to God that these penitents look a great way back in their penitential reflections, and are ashamed of all their trespasses which they were guilty of *when they dwelt safely in their land and none made them afraid.* The remembrance of the mercies they enjoyed in their own land, and the divine protection they were under there, shall be improved as an aggravation of the sins they committed in that land; they dwelt safely, and might have



continued to dwell so, and none should have given them any disquiet or disturbance if they had continued in the way of their duty. Nay, *therefore* they trespassed because *they dwell safely*. Outward safety is often a cause of inward security, and that is an inlet to all sin, Ps. lxxiii. Now this they are willing to bear the shame of, and acknowledge that God has justly brought them into a land of trouble, where every one makes them afraid, because they had trespassed against him in a land of peace, where none made them afraid. And, when they thus humble themselves under humbling providences, God will bring again their captivity: and,

2. What then? When God has gathered them out of their enemies' hands, and brought them home again, (1.) Then God will have the praise of it: *I will be sanctified in them in the sight of many nations, v. 27.* As God was reproached in the reproach they were under during their captivity, so he will be sanctified in their reformation and the making of them a holy people again, and will be glorified in their restoration and the making of them a happy glorious people again. (2.) Then they shall have the benefit of it (v. 28): *They shall know that I am the Lord their God.* Note, The providences of God concerning his people, that are designed for their good, have the grace of God going along with them to teach them to eye God as the Lord, and their God, in all; and then they do them good. They shall eye him as the Lord and their God, [1.] In their calamities, that it was he who *caused them to be led into captivity*; and therefore they must not only submit to his will, but endeavour to answer his end in it. [2.] In their comfort, that it is he who has *gathered them to their own land*, and left none of them among the heathen. Note, By the variety of events that befall us, if we look up to God in all, we may come to acquaint ourselves better with his various attributes and designs. (3.) Then God and they will never part, v. 29. [1.] God will *pour out his Spirit* upon them, to prevent their departures from him and returns to folly again, and to keep them close to their duty. And then, [2.] He will *never hide his face any more from them*, will never suspend his favour as he had done; he will never turn from doing them good, and, in order to that, he will effectually provide that they shall never turn from doing him service. Note, The indwelling of the Spirit is an infallible pledge of the continuance of God's favour. He will hide his face no more from those on whom he has *poured out his Spirit*. When therefore we pray that God would never *cast us away from his presence* we must as earnestly pray that, in order to that, he would *never take his Holy Spirit away from us*, Ps. li. 11.

## CHAP. XL.

The waters of the sanctuary which this prophet saw in vision (ch. xlvii. 1) are a proper representation of this prophecy. Hitherto the

waters have been sometimes but to the anches, in other places to the knees, or to the loins, but now the waters have risen, and have become "a river which cannot be passed over." Here is one continued vision, beginning at this chapter, to the end of the book, which is justly looked upon to be one of the most difficult portions of scripture in all the book of God. The Jews will not allow any to read it till they are thirty years old, and tell those who do read it that, though they cannot understand every thing in it, "when Elias comes he will explain it." Many commentators, both ancient and modern, have owned themselves at a loss what to make of it and what use to make of it. But because it is hard to be understood we must not therefore throw it by, but humbly search concerning it, get as far as we can into it and as much as we can out of it, and, when we despair of satisfaction in every difficulty we meet with, bless God that our salvation does not depend upon it, but that things necessary are plain enough, and wait till God shall reveal even this unto us. These chapters are the more to be regarded because the last two chapters of the Revelation seem to have a plain allusion to them, as Rev. xx. has to the foregoing prophecy of Gog and Magog. Here is the vision of a glorious temple (in this chapter and ch. xli. and xlii.), of God's taking possession of it (ch. xliii.), orders concerning the priests that are to minister in this temple (ch. xliii.), the division of the land, what portion should be allotted for the sanctuary, what for the city, and what for the prince, both in his government of the people and his worship of God (ch. xliii.), and further instructions for him and the people, ch. xliii. After the vision of the holy waters we have the borders of the holy land, and the portions assigned to the tribes, and the dimensions and gates of the holy city, ch. xliii. xlviii. Some make this to represent what had been during the flourishing state of the Jewish church, how glorious Solomon's temple was in its best days, that the captives might see what they had lost by sin and might be the more humbled. But that seems not probable. The general scope of it I take to be, 1. To assure the captives that they should not only return to their own land, and be settled there, which had been often promised in the foregoing chapters, but that they should have, and therefore should be encouraged to build, another temple, which God would own, and where he would meet them and bless them, that the ordinances of worship should be revived, and the sacred priesthood should there attend; and, though they should not have a king to live in such splendour as formerly, yet they should have a prince or ruler (who is often spoken of in this vision), who should countenance the worship of God among them and should himself be an example of diligent attendance upon it, and that prince, priests, and people, should have a very comfortable settlement and subsistence in their own land. 2. To direct them to look further than all this, and to expect the coming of the Messiah, who had before been prophesied of under the name of David because he was the man that projected the building of the temple and that should set up a spiritual temple, even the gospel-church, the glory of which should far exceed that of Solomon's temple, and which should continue to the end of time. The dimensions of these visionary buildings being so large (the new temple more spacious than all the old Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem of greater extent than all the land of Canaan) plainly intimates, as Dr. Lightfoot observes, that these things cannot be literally, but must be spiritually, understood. And the gospel-temple, erected by Christ and his apostles, was so closely connected with the second material temple, was erected so carefully just at the time when that fell into decay, that it might be ready to receive its glories when it resigned them, that it was proper enough that they should both be referred to in one and the same vision. Under the type and figure of a temple and altar, priests and sacrifices, is foreshown the spiritual worship that should be performed in gospel times, more agreeably to the nature both of God and man, and that perfected at last in the kingdom of glory, in which perhaps these visions will have their full accomplishment, and some think in some happy and glorious state of the gospel-church on this side heaven, in the latter days.

In this chapter we have, I. A general account of this vision of the temple and city, ver. 1—4. II. A particular account of it entered upon; and a description given, 1. Of the outside wall, ver. 5. 2. Of the east gate, ver. 6—19. 3. Of the north gate, ver. 20—23. 4. Of the south gate (ver. 24—31) and the chambers and other appurtenances belonging to these gates. 5. Of the inner court, both towards the east and towards the south, ver. 32—35. 6. Of the tables, ver. 39—43. 7. Of the lodgings for the singers and the priests, ver. 44—47. 8. Of the porch of the house, ver. 48, 49.

IN the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of the LORD was upon me, and brought me thither. 2 In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which *was* as the frame of a city on the south. 3 And

he brought me thither, and, behold, *there was* a man, whose appearance *was* like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring-reed; and he stood in the gate. 4 And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee; for to the intent that I might show *them* unto thee *art* thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.

Here is, 1. The date of this vision. It was in the twenty-fifth year of Ezekiel's captivity (*v. 1*), which some compute to be the thirty-third year of the first captivity, and is here said to be the *fourteenth year after the city was smitten*. See how seasonably the clearest and fullest prospects of their deliverance were given, when they were in the depth of their distress, and an assurance of the return of the morning when they were in the midnight of their captivity: "Then the hand of the Lord was upon me and brought me thither to Jerusalem, now that it was in ruins, desolate and deserted"—a pitiable sight to the prophet. 2. The scene where it was laid. The prophet was brought, *in the visions of God, to the land of Israel, v. 2*. And it was not the first time that he had been brought thither in vision. We had him carried to Jerusalem to see it in its iniquity and shame (*ch. viii. 3*); here he is carried thither to have a pleasing prospect of it in its glory, though its present aspect, now that it was quite depopulated, was dismal. He was set upon a very high mountain, as Moses upon the top of Pisgah, to view this land, which was now a second time a land of promise, not yet in possession. From the top of this mountain he saw as the frame of a city, the plan and model of it; but this city was a temple as large as a city. The New Jerusalem (*Rev. xxi. 22*) had no temple therein; this which we have here is *all temple*, which comes much to one. It is a city for men to dwell in; it is a temple for God to dwell in; for in the church on earth God dwells with men, in that in heaven men dwell with God. Both these are framed in the counsel of God, framed by infinite wisdom, and all very good. 3. The particular discoveries of this city (which he had at first a general view of) were made to him by a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass (*v. 3*), not a created angel, but Jesus Christ, who should be found in fashion as a man, that he might both discover and build the gospel-temple. He brought him to this city, for it is through Christ that we have both acquaintance with and access to the benefits and privileges of God's house. He it is that shall build the temple of the Lord, *Zech. vi. 13*. His ap-

pearing like brass intimates both his brightness and his strength. John, in vision, saw *his feet like unto fine brass, Rev. i. 15. 4*. The dimensions of this city or temple, and the several parts of it, were taken with a line of flax and a measuring reed, or rod (*v. 3*), as carpenters have both their line and a wooden measure. The temple of God is built by line and rule; and those that would let others into the knowledge of it must do it by that line and rule. The church is formed according to the scripture, *the pattern in the mount*. That is the line and the measuring reed that is in the hand of Christ. With that doctrine and laws ought to be measured, and examined by that; for then peace is upon the Israel of God when they walk according to that rule. 5. Directions are here given to the prophet to receive this revelation from the Lord and transmit it pure and entire to the church, *v. 4*. (1.) He must carefully observe every thing that was said and done in this vision. His attention is raised and engaged (*v. 4*): "Behold with thy eyes all that is shown thee (do not only see it, but look intently upon it), and hear with thy ears all that is said to thee; diligently hearken to it, and be sure to set thy heart upon it; attend with a fixedness of thought and a close application of mind." What we see of the works of God, and what we hear of the word of God, will do us no good unless we set our hearts upon it, as those that reckon ourselves nearly concerned in it, and expect advantage to our souls by it. (2.) He must faithfully declare it to the house of Israel, that they may have the comfort of it. Therefore he receives, that he may give. Thus the Revelation of Jesus Christ was lodged in the hands of John, that he might signify it to the churches, *Rev. i. 1*. And, because he is to declare it as a message from God, he must therefore be fully apprised of it himself and much affected with it. Note, Those who are to preach God's word to others ought to study it well themselves and set their hearts upon it. Now the reason given why he must both observe it himself and declare it to the house of Israel is because to this intent he is brought hither, and has it shown to him. Note, When the things of God are shown to us it concerns us to consider to what intent they are shown to us, and, when we are sitting under the ministry of the word, to consider to what intent we are brought thither, that we may answer the end of our coming, and may not receive the grace of God, in showing us such things, in vain.

5 And behold a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand a measuring-reed of six cubits long by the cubit and a hand-breadth: so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed. 6 Then came he



unto the gate which looketh toward the east, and went up the stairs thereof, and measured the threshold of the gate, *which was* one reed broad; and the other threshold *of the gate, which was* one reed broad. 7 And every little chamber *was* one reed long, and one reed broad; and between the little chambers *were* five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate within *was* one reed. 8 He measured also the porch of the gate within, one reed. 9 Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and the posts thereof, two cubits; and the porch of the gate *was* inward. 10 And the little chambers of the gate eastward *were* three on this side, and three on that side; they three *were* of one measure: and the posts had one measure on this side and on that side. 11 And he measured the breadth of the entry of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits. 12 The space also before the little chambers *was* one cubit *on this side*, and the space *was* one cubit on that side: and the little chambers *were* six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side. 13 He measured then the gate from the roof of *one* little chamber to the roof of another: the breadth *was* five and twenty cubits, door against door. 14 He made also posts of threescore cubits, even unto the post of the court round about the gate. 15 And from the face of the gate of the entrance unto the face of the porch of the inner gate *were* fifty cubits. 16 And *there were* narrow windows to the little chambers, and to their posts within the gate round about, and likewise to the arches: and windows *were* round about inward: and upon *each* post *were* palm-trees. 17 Then brought he me into the outward court, and, lo, *there were* chambers, and a pavement made for the court round about: thirty chambers *were* upon the pavement. 18 And the pavement by the side of the gates over against the length of the gates *was* the lower pavement. 19 Then he measured the breadth from the fore-front of the lower gate unto the fore-front of the

inner court without, a hundred cubits eastward and northward. 20 And the gate of the outward court that looked toward the north, he measured the length thereof, and the breadth thereof. 21 And the little chambers thereof *were* three on this side, and three on that side; and the posts thereof and the arches thereof were after the measure of the first gate: the length thereof *was* fifty cubits, and the breadth five and twenty cubits. 22 And their windows, and their arches, and their palm-trees, *were* after the measure of the gate that looketh toward the east; and they went up unto it by seven steps; and the arches thereof *were* before them. 23 And the gate of the inner court *was* over against the gate toward the north, and toward the east; and he measured from gate to gate a hundred cubits. 24 After that he brought me toward the south, and behold a gate toward the south: and he measured the posts thereof and the arches thereof according to these measures. 25 And *there were* windows in it and in the arches thereof round about, like those windows: the length *was* fifty cubits, and the breadth five and twenty cubits. 26 And *there were* seven steps to go up to it, and the arches thereof *were* before them: and it had palm-trees, one on this side, and another on that side, upon the posts thereof.

The measuring-reed which was in the hand of the surveyor-general was mentioned before, *v. 3*. Here we are told (*v. 5*) what was the exact length of it, which must be observed, because the house was measured by it. It was *six cubits long*, reckoning, not by the common cubit, but the *cubit of the sanctuary*, the sacred cubit, by which it was fit that this holy house should be measured, and that was a hand-breadth (that is, four inches) longer than the common cubit: the common cubit was eighteen inches, this twenty-two, see *ch. xliii. 13*. Yet some of the critics contend that this *measuring-reed* was but six common cubits in length, and one hand-breadth added to the whole. The former seems more probable. Here is an account,

I. Of the outer wall of the house, which encompassed it round, which was three yards thick and three yards high, which denotes the separation between the church and the world on every side and the divine protection which the church is under. If a wall of this vast

thickness will not secure it, God himself will be a wall of fire round about it; whoever attack it will do so at their peril.

II. Of the several gates with the chambers adjoining to them. Here is no mention of the outer court of all, which was called the *court of the Gentiles*, some think because in gospel-times there should be such a vast confluence of Gentiles to the church that their court should be left unmeasured, to signify that the worshippers in that court should be unnumbered, Rev. vii. 9, 11, 12.

1. He begins with the *east gate*, because that was the usual way of entering into the lower end of the temple, the holy of holies being at the west end, in opposition to the idolatrous heathen that worshipped towards the east. Now, in the account of this gate, observe, (1.) That he went up to it by *stairs* (v. 6), for the gospel-church was exalted above that of the Old Testament, and when we go to worship God we must ascend; so is the call, Rev. iv. 1. Come up hither. *Sursum corda—Up with your hearts.* (2.) That the chambers adjoining to the gates were but *little chambers*, about ten feet square, v. 7. These were for those to lodge in who attended the service of the house. And it becomes such as are made spiritual priests to God to content themselves with little chambers and not to seek great things to themselves; so that we may but have a place within the verge of God's court we have reason to be thankful though it be in a little chamber, a mean apartment, though we be but door-keepers there. (3.) The chambers, as they were each of them four-square, denoting their stability and due proportion and their exact agreement with the rule (for they were each of them one reed long and one reed broad), so they were all of *one measure*, that there might be an equality among the attendants on the service of the house. (4.) The chambers were very many; for in our Father's house there are *many mansions* (John xiv. 2), in his house above, and in that here on earth. In the secret of his tabernacle shall those be hid, and in a safe pavilion, whose desire is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, Ps. xxvii. 4, 5. Some make these chambers to represent the particular congregations of believers, which are parts of the great temple, the universal church, which are, and must be, framed by the scripture-line and rule, and which Jesus Christ takes the measure of, that is, takes cognizance of, for he walks in the midst of the seven golden candle-sticks. (5.) It is said (v. 14), *He made also the posts.* He that now measured them was the same that made them; for Christ is the builder of his church and therefore is best able to give us the knowledge of it. And his reducing them to the rule and standard is called his making them, for no account is made of them further than they agree with that. *To the law and to the testimony.*

(6.) Here are posts of sixty cubits, which, some think, was literally fulfilled when Cyrus, in his edict for rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, ordered that the height thereof should be sixty cubits, that is, thirty yards and more, Ezra vi. 3. (7.) Here were windows to the little chambers, and windows to the *posts and arches* (that is, to the cloisters below), and *windows round about* (v. 16), to signify the light from heaven with which the church is illuminated; divine revelation is let into it for instruction, direction, and comfort, to those that dwell in God's house, light to work by, light to walk by, light to see themselves and one another by. There were lights to the little chambers; even the least, and least considerable, parts and members of the church, shall have light afforded them. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.* But they are *narrow windows*, as those in the temple, 1 Kings vi. 4. The discoveries made to the church on earth are but narrow and scanty compared with what shall be in the future state, when we shall no longer see *through a glass darkly*. (8.) Divers courts are here spoken of, an outermost of all, then an outer court, then an inner, and then the innermost of all, into which the priests only entered, which (some think) may put us in mind "of the diversities of gifts, and graces, and offices, in the several members of Christ's mystical body here, as also of the several degrees of glory in the courts and mansions of heaven, as there are stars in several spheres and stars of several magnitudes in the fixed firmament." *English Annotations.* Some draw nearer to God than others and have a more intimate acquaintance with divine things; but to a child of God a day in any of his courts is *better than a thousand elsewhere*. These courts had porches, or piazzas, round them, for the shelter of those that attended in them from wind and weather; for when we are in the way of our duty to God we may believe ourselves to be under his special protection, that he will graciously provide for us, nay, that he will himself be to us *a covert from the storm and tempest*, Isa. iv. 5, 6. (9.) On the posts were palm-trees engraven (v. 16), to signify that *the righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree* in the courts of God's house, Ps. xcii. 12. The more they are depressed with the burden of affliction the more strongly do they grow, as they say of the palm-trees. It likewise intimates the saints' victory and triumph over their spiritual enemies; they have *palm*s in their hands (Rev. vii. 9); but lest they should drop these, or have them snatched out of their hands, they are here engraven upon the posts of the temple as perpetual monuments of their honour. *Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph.* Nay, believers shall themselves be made pillars in the temple of our God, and shall go no more out, and shall have his name engraven on them, which will be their brightest ornament and honour,



Rev. iii. 12. (10) Notice is here taken of the pavement of the court, v. 17, 18. The word intimates that the pavement was made of *porphyry-stone*, which was of the colour of *burning coals*; for the brightest and most sparkling glories of this world should be put and kept under our feet when we draw near to God and are attending upon him. The stars are, as it were, the *burning coals*, or stones of a *fiery colour*, with which the pavement of God's celestial temple is laid; and, if the pavement of the court be so bright and glittering, how glorious must we conclude the mansions of that house to be!

2. The gates that looked towards the north (v. 20) and towards the south (v. 24), with their appurtenances, are much the same with that towards the east, *after the measure of the first gate*, v. 21. But the description is repeated very particularly. And thus largely was the structure of the tabernacle related in Exodus, and of the temple in the books of Kings and Chronicles, to signify the special notice God does take, and his ministers should take, of all that belong to his church. His delight is in them; his eye is upon them. He knows all that are his, all his living temples and all that belongs to them. Observe, (1.) This temple had not only a gate towards the east, to let into it the *children of the east*, that were famous for their wealth and wisdom, but it had a gate to the north, and another to the south, for the admission of the poorer and less civilized nations. The new Jerusalem has *twelve gates*, three towards each quarter of the world (Rev. xxi. 13); for many shall come from all parts to sit down there, Matt. viii. 11. (2.) To those gates they went up by steps, *seven steps* (v. 22—26), which, as some observe, may remind us of the necessity of advancing in grace and holiness, adding one grace to another, going from step to step, *from strength to strength*, still pressing forward towards perfection—upward, upward, towards heaven, the temple above.

27 And *there was* a gate in the inner court toward the south: and he measured from gate to gate toward the south a hundred cubits. 28 And he brought me to the inner court by the south gate: and he measured the south gate according to these measures; 29 And the little chambers thereof, and the posts thereof, and the arches thereof, according to these measures: and *there were* windows in it and in the arches thereof round about: *it was* fifty cubits long, and five and twenty cubits broad. 30 And the arches round about *were* five and twenty cubits long, and five cubits broad. 31 And the arches thereof

*were* toward the utter court; and palm-trees *were* upon the posts thereof: and the going up to it *had* eight steps. 32 And he brought me into the inner court toward the east: and he measured the gate according to these measures. 33 And the little chambers thereof, and the posts thereof, and the arches thereof, *were* according to these measures: and *there were* windows therein and in the arches thereof round about: *it was* fifty cubits long, and five and twenty cubits broad. 34 And the arches thereof *were* toward the outward court; and palm-trees *were* upon the posts thereof, on this side, and on that side: and the going up to it *had* eight steps. 35 And he brought me to the north gate, and measured *it* according to these measures; 36 The little chambers thereof, the posts thereof, and the arches thereof, and the windows to it round about: the length *was* fifty cubits, and the breadth five and twenty cubits. 37 And the posts thereof *were* toward the utter court; and palm-trees *were* upon the posts thereof, on this side, and on that side: and the going up to it *had* eight steps. 38 And the chambers and the entries thereof *were* by the posts of the gates, where they washed the burnt-offering.

In these verses we have a delineation of the inner court. The survey of the outer court ended with the south side of it. This of the inner court begins with the south side (v. 27), proceeds to the east (v. 32), and so to the north (v. 35); for here is no gate either of the outer or inner court towards the *west*. It should seem that in Solomon's temple there were gates westward, for we find porters towards the west, 1 Chron. ix. 24; xxvi. 8. But Josephus says that in the second temple there was no gate on the west side. Observe, 1. These gates into the inner court were exactly uniform with those into the outer court, the dimensions the same, the chambers adjoining the same, the galleries or rows round the court the same, and the very engravings on the posts the same. The work of grace, and its workings, are the same, for substance, in grown Christians that they are in young beginners, only that the former have got so much nearer their perfection. The faith of all the saints is alike precious, though it be not alike strong. There is a great resemblance between one child of God and another; for *all they are*

*brethren* and bear the same image. 2. The ascent into the outer court at each gate was by *seven steps*, but the ascent into the inner court at each gate was by *eight steps*. This is expressly taken notice of (v. 31, 34, 37), to signify that the nearer we approach to God the more we should rise above this world and the things of it. The people, who worshipped in the outer court, must rise seven steps above other people, but the priests, who attended in the inner court, must rise eight steps above them, must exceed them at least one step more than they exceed other people.

39 And in the porch of the gate *were* two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to slay thereon the burnt-offering and the sin-offering and the trespass-offering. 40 And at the side without, as one goeth up to the entry of the north gate, *were* two tables; and on the other side, which *was* at the porch of the gate, *were* two tables. 41 Four tables *were* on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate; eight tables, whereupon they slew *their sacrifices*. 42 And the four tables *were* of hewn stone for the burnt-offering, of a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high: whereupon also they laid the instruments wherewith they slew the burnt-offering and the sacrifice. 43 And within *were* hooks, a hand broad, fastened round about: and upon the tables *was* the flesh of the offering. 44 And without the inner gate *were* the chambers of the singers in the inner court, which *was* at the side of the north gate; and their prospect *was* toward the south: one at the side of the east gate *having* the prospect toward the north. 45 And he said unto me, This chamber, whose prospect *is* toward the south, *is* for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the house. 46 And the chamber whose prospect *is* toward the north *is* for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these *are* the sons of Zadok among the sons of Levi, which come near to the LORD to minister unto him. 47 So he measured the court, a hundred cubits long, and a hundred cubits broad, four-square; and the altar *that was* before the house. 48 And he

brought me to the porch of the house, and measured *each* post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side: and the breadth of the gate *was* three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side. 49 The length of the porch *was* twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; and *he brought me* by the steps whereby they went up to it: and *there were* pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side.

In these verses we have an account,

I. Of the tables that were in the porch of the gates of the inner court. We find no description of the altars of burnt-offerings in the midst of that court till *ch. xliii. 13*. But, because the one altar under the law was to be exchanged for a multitude of tables under the gospel, here is *early notice* taken of the tables, at our entrance into the inner court; for till we come to partake of the *table of the Lord* we are but professors at large; our admission to that is our entrance into the inner court. But in this gospel-temple we meet with no altar till after the glory of the Lord has taken possession of it, for Christ is our altar, that sanctifies every gift. Here were eight tables provided, whereon to *slay the sacrifices*, v. 41. We read not of any tables for this purpose either in the tabernacle or in Solomon's temple. But here they are provided, to intimate the multitude of spiritual sacrifices that should be brought to God's house in gospel-times, and the multitude of hands that should be employed in offering up those sacrifices. Here were the shambles for the altar; here were the dressers on which they laid the flesh of the sacrifice, the knives with which they cut it up, and the hooks on which they hung it up, that it might be ready to be offered on the altar (v. 43), and there also they washed the burnt-offerings (v. 38), to intimate that before we draw near to God's altar we must have every thing in readiness, must wash our hands, our hearts, those spiritual sacrifices, and so *compass God's altar*.

II. The use that some of the chambers mentioned before were put to. 1. Some were for the *singers*, v. 44. It should seem they were first provided for before any other that attended this temple-service, to intimate, not only that the singing of psalms should still continue a gospel-ordinance, but that the gospel should furnish all that embrace it with abundant matter for joy and praise, and give them occasion to *break forth into singing*, which is often foretold concerning gospel times, Ps. xcvi. 1; xcvi. 1. Christians should be singers. *Blessed are those that dwell in God's house, they will be still praising him*. 2. Others of them were



for the priests, both those that kept the charge of the house, to cleanse it, and to see that none came into it to pollute it, and to keep it in good repair (v. 45), and those that kept the charge of the altar (v. 46), that came near to the Lord to minister to him. God will find convenient lodging for all his servants. Those that do the work of his house shall enjoy the comforts of it.

III. Of the inner court, the court of the priests, which was fifty yards square, v. 47. The altar that was before the house was placed in the midst of this court, over-against the three gates, and, standing in a direct line with the three gates of the outer court, when the gates were set open all the people in the outer court might through them be spectators of the service done at the altar. Christ is both our altar and our sacrifice, to whom we must look with an eye of faith in all our approaches to God, and he is salvation in the midst of the earth (Ps. lxxiv. 12), to be looked unto from all quarters.

IV. Of the porch of the house. The temple is called the house, emphatically, as if no other house were worthy to be called so. Before this house there was a porch, to teach us not to rush hastily and inconsiderately into the presence of God, but gradually, that is, gravely, and with solemnity, passing first through the outer court, then the inner, then the porch, ere we enter into the house. Between this porch and the altar was a place where the priests used to pray, Joel ii. 17. In the porch, besides the posts on which the doors were hung, there were pillars, probably for state and ornament, like *Jachin* and *Boaz*—*He will establish; in him is strength*, v. 49. In the gospel church every thing is strong and firm, and every thing ought to be kept in its place and to be done decently and in order.

#### CHAP. XLI.

An account was given of the porch of the house in the close of the foregoing chapter; this brings us to the temple itself, the description of which here given creates much difficulty to the critical expositors and occasions differences among them. Those must consult the who are nice in their enquiries into the meaning of the particulars of this delineation; it shall suffice us to observe, I. The dimensions of the house, the posts of it (ver. 1), the door (ver. 2), the wall and the side-chambers (ver. 5, 6), the foundations and wall of the chambers, their doors (ver. 8—11), and the house itself, ver. 13. II. The dimensions of the oracle, or most holy place, ver. 3, 4. III. An account of another building over against the separate place, ver. 12—15. IV. The manner of the building of the house, ver. 7, 16, 17. V. The ornaments of the house, ver. 18—20. VI. The altar of incense and the table, ver. 22. VII. The doors between the temple and the oracle, ver. 23—25. There is so much difference both in the terms and in the rules of architecture between one age and another, one place and another, that it ought not to be any standing-block to us that there is so much in these descriptions dark and hard to be understood, about the meaning of which the learned are not agreed. To one not skilled in mathematics the mathematical description of a modern structure would be scarcely intelligible; and yet to a common carpenter or mason among the Jews at that time we may suppose that all this, in the literal sense of it, was easy enough.

**A**FTERWARD he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the taber-

nacle. 2 And the breadth of the door was ten cubits; and the sides of the door were five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side: and he measured the length thereof, forty cubits: and the breadth, twenty cubits. 3 Then went he inward, and measured the post of the door, two cubits; and the door, six cubits; and the breadth of the door, seven cubits. 4 So he measured the length thereof, twenty cubits; and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple: and he said unto me, This is the most holy place. 5 After he measured the wall of the house, six cubits; and the breadth of every side-chamber, four cubits, round about the house on every side. 6 And the side-chambers were three, one over another, and thirty in order; and they entered into the wall which was of the house for the side-chambers round about, that they might have hold, but they had not hold in the wall of the house. 7 And there was an enlarging, and a winding about still upward to the side-chambers: for the winding about of the house went still upward round about the house: therefore the breadth of the house was still upward, and so increased from the lowest chamber to the highest by the midst. 8 I saw also the height of the house round about: the foundations of the side-chambers were a full reed of six great cubits. 9 The thickness of the wall, which was for the side-chamber without, was five cubits: and that which was left was the place of the side-chambers that were within. 10 And between the chambers was the wideness of twenty cubits round about the house on every side. 11 And the doors of the side-chambers were toward the place that was left, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south: and the breadth of the place that was left was five cubits round about.

We are still attending a prophet that is under the guidance of an angel, and therefore attend with reverence, though we are often at a loss to know both what this is and what it is to us. Observe here, 1. After the prophet had observed the courts he was at length brought to the temple, v. 1. If we

diligently attend to the instructions given us in the plainer parts of religion, and profit by them, we shall be led further into an acquaintance with the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Those that are willing to dwell in God's courts shall at length be brought into his temple. Ezekiel was himself a priest, but by the iniquity and calamity of the times was cut short of his birthright privilege of ministering in the temple; but God makes up the loss to him by introducing him into this prophetic, evangelical, celestial temple, and employing him to transmit a description of it to the church, in which he was dignified above all the rest of his order. 2. When our Lord Jesus spoke of the destroying of *this temple*, which his hearers understood of this second temple of Jerusalem, he spoke of the temple of his body (John ii. 19, 21); and with good reason might he speak so ambiguously when Ezekiel's vision had a joint respect to them both together, including also his mystical body the church, which is called the *house of God* (1 Tim. iii. 15), and all the members of that body, which are *living temples*, in which the Spirit dwells. 3. The very posts of this temple, the door-posts, were as far one from the other, and consequently the door was as wide, as *the whole breadth of the tabernacle of Moses* (v. 1), namely, twelve cubits, Exod. xxvi. 16, 22, 25. In comparison with what had been under the law we may say, *Wide is the gate* which leads into the church, the ceremonial law, that wall of partition which had so much straitened the gate, being taken down. 4. The most holy place was an exact square, twenty cubits each way, v. 4. For the new Jerusalem is exactly square (Rev. xxi. 16), denoting its stability; for we look for a city that cannot be moved. 5. The upper stories were larger than the lower, v. 7. The walls of the temple were six cubits thick at the bottom, five in the middle story, and four in the highest, which gave room to enlarge the chambers the higher they went; but care was taken that the timber might have *fast hold* (though God builds high, he builds firmly), yet so as not to weaken one part for the strengthening of another; they had hold, but not *in the wall of the house*. By this spreading gradually, the *side-chambers* that were on *the height of the house* (in the uppermost story of all) were six cubits, whereas the lowest were but four; they gained a cubit every story. The higher we build up ourselves in our most holy faith the more should our hearts, those living temples, be enlarged.

12 Now the building that *was* before the separate place at the end toward the west *was* seventy cubits broad; and the wall of the building *was* five cubits thick round about, and the length thereof ninety cubits. 13

So he measured the house, a hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with the walls thereof, a hundred cubits long; 14 Also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, a hundred cubits. 15 And he measured the length of the building over against the separate place which *was* behind it, and the galleries thereof on the one side and on the other side, a hundred cubits, with the inner temple, and the porches of the court; 16 The door-posts, and the narrow windows, and the galleries round about on their three stories, over against the door, ceiled with wood round about, and from the ground up to the windows, and the windows *were* covered; 17 To that above the door, even unto the inner house, and without, and by all the wall round about within and without, by measure. 18 And *it was* made with cherubims and palm-trees, so that a palm-tree *was* between a cherub and a cherub; and *every* cherub had two faces; 19 So that the face of a man *was* toward the palm-tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm-tree on the other side: *it was* made through all the house round about. 20 From the ground unto above the door *were* cherubims and palm-trees made, and *on* the wall of the temple. 21 The posts of the temple *were* squared, and the face of the sanctuary; the appearance of *the one* as the appearance of *the other*. 22 The altar of wood *was* three cubits high, and the length thereof two cubits; and the corners thereof, and the length thereof, and the walls thereof, *were* of wood: and he said unto me, *This is* the table that *is* before the LORD. 23 And the temple and the sanctuary had two doors. 24 And the doors had two leaves *a-piece*, two turning leaves; two *leaves* for the one door, and two leaves for the other door. 25 And *there were* made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubims and palm-trees, like as *were* made upon the walls; and *there were* thick planks upon the face of the porch



without. 26 And *there were* narrow windows and palm-trees on the one side and on the other side, on the sides of the porch, and *upon* the side-chambers of the house, and thick planks.

Here is, 1. An account of a building that was *before the separate place* (that is, before the temple), *at the end towards the west* (v. 12), which is here measured, and compared (v. 13) with the measure of the house, and appears to be of equal dimensions with it. This stood in a court by itself, which is measured (v. 15) and its galleries, or chambers belonging to it, its posts and windows, and the ornaments of them, v. 15—17. But what use was to be made of this other building we are not told; perhaps, in this vision, it signified the setting up of a church among the Gentiles not inferior to the Jewish temple, but of quite another nature, and which should soon supersede it. 2. A description of the ornaments of the temple, and the other building. The walls on the inside from top to bottom were adorned with *cherubim* and *palm-trees*, placed alternately, as in Solomon's temple, 1 Kings vi. 29. Each cherub is here said to have two *faces*, the *face of a man* towards the palm-tree on one side and the *face of a young lion* towards the palm-tree on the other side, v. 19. These seem to represent the angels, who have more than the wisdom of a man and the courage of a lion; and in both they have an eye to the palms of victory and triumph which are set before them, and which they are sure of in all their conflicts with the powers of darkness. And in the assemblies of the saints angels are in a special manner present, 1 Cor. xi. 10. 3. A description of the posts of the doors both of the temple and of the sanctuary; they were *squared* (v. 21), not round like pillars; and the *appearance of the one was as the appearance of the other*. In the tabernacle, and in Solomon's temple, the door of the sanctuary, or most holy, was narrower than that of the temple, but here it was fully as broad; for in gospel-times *the way into the holiest of all is made more manifest* than it was under the Old Testament (Heb. ix. 8) and therefore the door is wider. These doors are described, v. 23, 24. The temple and the sanctuary had each of them its door, and they were *two-leaved*, folding doors. 4. We have here the description of the altar of incense, here said to be an *altar of wood*, v. 22. No mention is made of its being *overlaid with gold*; but surely it was intended to be so, else it would not bear the fire with which the incense was to be burned, unless we will suppose that it served only to put the censers upon. Or else it intimates that the incense to be offered in the gospel-temple shall be purely spiritual, and the fire spiritual, which will not consume an altar of wood. Therefore this altar is called a table. *This is the table that is before the Lord.*

Here, as before, we find the altar turned into a table; for, the great sacrifice being now offered, that which we have to do is to feast upon the sacrifice at the Lord's table. 5. Here is the adorning of the doors and windows with palm-trees, that they might be of a piece with the walls of the house, v. 25, 26. Thus the living temples are adorned, not with gold, or silver, or costly array, but with the *hidden man of the heart*, in that which is not corruptible.

## CHAP. XLII.

This chapter continues and concludes the describing and measuring of this mystical temple, which it is very hard to understand the particular architecture of, and yet more hard to comprehend the mystical meaning of. Here is, I. A description of the chambers that were about the courts, their situation and structure (v. 1—13), and the uses for which they were designed, ver. 13, 14. II. A survey of the whole compass of ground which was taken up with the house, and the courts belonging to it, ver. 15—20.

**T**HEN he brought me forth into the utter court, the way toward the north: and he brought me into the chamber that *was* over against the separate place, and which *was* before the building toward the north. 2 Before the length of a hundred cubits *was* the north door, and the breadth *was* fifty cubits. 3 Over against the twenty cubits which *were* for the inner court, and over against the pavement which *was* for the utter court, *was* gallery against gallery in three stories. 4 And before the chambers *was* a walk of ten cubits breadth inward, a way of one cubit; and their doors toward the north. 5 Now the upper chambers *were* shorter: for the galleries were higher than these, than the lower, and than the middlemost of the building. 6 For they *were* in three stories, but had not pillars as the pillars of the courts: therefore *the building* was straitened more than the lowest and the middlemost from the ground. 7 And the wall that *was* without over against the chambers, toward the utter court on the forepart of the chambers, the length thereof *was* fifty cubits. 8 For the length of the chambers that *were* in the utter court *was* fifty cubits: and, lo, before the temple *were* a hundred cubits. 9 And from under these chambers *was* the entry on the east side, as one goeth into them from the utter court. 10 The chambers *were* in the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, over against the separate place, and over against the building. 11

And the way before them *was* like the appearance of the chambers which *were* toward the north, as long as they, *and* as broad as they: and all their goings out *were* both according to their fashions, and according to their doors. 12 And according to the doors of the chambers that *were* toward the south *was* a door in the head of the way, *even* the way directly before the wall toward the east, as one entereth into them. 13 Then said he unto me, The north chambers *and* the south chambers, which *are* before the separate place, they *be* holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat-offering, and the sin-offering, and the trespass-offering; for the place *is* holy. 14 When the priests enter therein, then shall they not go out of the holy *place* into the utter court, but there they shall lay their garments wherein they minister; for they *are* holy; and shall put on other garments, and shall approach to *those things* which *are* for the people.

The prophet has taken a very exact view of the temple and the buildings belonging to it, and is now brought again into the outer court, to observe the chambers that were in that square.

I. Here is a description of these chambers, which (as that which went before) seems to us very perplexed and intricate, through our unacquaintedness with the Hebrew language and the rules of architecture at that time. We shall only observe, in general, 1. That about the temple, which was the place of public worship, there were private chambers, to teach us that our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances will not excuse us from the duties of the closet. We must not only worship in the courts of God's house, but must, both before and after our attendance there, enter into our chambers, enter into our closets, and read and meditate, and *pray to our Father in secret*; and a great deal of comfort the people of God have found in their communion with God in solitude. 2. That these chambers were many; there were *three stories* of them, and, though the higher stories were not so large as the lower, yet they served as well for retirement, v. 5, 6. There were many, that there might be conveniences for all such devout people as Anna the prophetess, who *departed not from the temple night or day*, Luke ii. 37. In my Fa-

*ther's house are many mansions*. In his house on earth there are so; multitudes by faith have taken lodgings in his sanctuary, and *yet there is room*. 3. That these chambers, though they were private, yet were near the temple, within view of it, within reach of it, to teach us to prefer public worship before private (*the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*, and so must we), and to refer our private worship to the public. Our religious performances in our chambers must be to prepare us for the exercises of devotion in public, and to further us in our improvement of them, as our opportunities are. 4. That before these chambers there were *walks of five yards broad* (v. 4), in which those that had lodgings in these chambers might meet for conversation, might walk and talk together for their mutual edification, might communicate their knowledge and experiences. For we are not to spend all our time between the church and the chamber, though a great deal of time may be spent to very good purpose in both. But man is made for society, and Christians for the communion of saints; and the duties of that communion we must make conscience of, and the privileges and pleasures of that communion we must take the comfort of. It is promised to Joshua, who was high priest in the second temple, that God will *give him places to walk in among those that stand by*, Zech. iii. 7.

II. Here is the use of these chambers appointed, v. 13, 14. 1. They were *for the priests* that approach unto the Lord, that they may be always near their business and may not be non-residents. *Therefore* they are called *holy chambers*, because they were for use of those that ministered in holy things during their ministration. Those that have public work to do for God and the souls of men have need to be much in private, to fit themselves for it. Ministers should spend much time in their chambers, in reading, meditation, and prayer, that their *profiting may appear*; and they ought to be provided with conveniences for this purpose. 2. There the priests were to deposit *the most holy things*, those parts of the offerings which fell to their share; and there they were to *eat them*, they and their families, in a religious manner, for *the place is holy*; and thus they must make a difference between those feasts upon the sacrifice and other meals. 3. There (among other uses) they were to lay their vestments, which God had appointed them to wear when they ministered at the altar, their linen ephods, coats, girdles, and bonnets. We read of the providing of priests' garments after their return out of captivity, Neh. vii. 70, 72. When they had ended their service at the altar they must lay by those garments, to signify that the use of them should continue only during that dispensation; but they must *put on other garments*, such as other people wear, when they



approached to those things which were for the people, that is, to do that part of their service which related to the people, to teach them the law and to answer their enquiries. Their holy garments must be *laid up*, that they may be kept clean and decent for the credit of their service.

15 Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth toward the gate whose prospect *is* toward the east, and measured it round about. 16 He measured the east side with the measuring-reed, five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed round about. 17 He measured the north side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed round about. 18 He measured the south side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed. 19 He turned about to the west side, *and* measured five hundred reeds, with the measuring-reed. 20 He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred *reeds* long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.

We have attended the measuring of this mystical temple and are now to see how far the holy ground on which we tread extends; and that also is here measured, and found to take in a great compass. Observe, 1. What the dimensions of it were. It extended each way 500 reeds (v. 16—19), each reed above three yards and a half, so that it reached every way about an English measured mile, which, the ground lying square, was above four miles round. Thus large were the suburbs (as I may call them) of this mystical temple, signifying the great extent of the church in gospel-times, when all nations should be discipled and the kingdoms of the world made Christ's kingdoms. Room should be made in God's courts for the numerous forces of the Gentiles that shall flow into them, as was foretold, Isa. xlix. 18; lx. 4. It is in part fulfilled already in the accession of the Gentiles to the church; and we trust it shall have a more full accomplishment when the *fulness of the Gentiles shall come in and all Israel shall be saved*. 2. Why the dimensions of it were made thus large. It was to *make a separation*, by putting a very large distance *between the sanctuary and the profane place*; and therefore there was a wall surrounding it, to keep off those that were unclean and to separate between the *precious and the vile*. Note, A difference is to be put between common and sacred things, between God's name and other names, between his day and other days, his

book and other books, his institutions and other observances; and a distance is to be put between our worldly and religious actions, so as still to go about the worship of God with a solemn pause.

## CHAP. XLIII.

The prophet, having given us a view of the mystical temple, the gospel-church, as he received it from the Lord, that it might appear not to be erected in vain, comes to describe, in this and the next chapter, the worship that should be performed in it, but under the type of the Old-Testament services. In this chapter we have, I. Possession taken of this temple, by the glory of God filling it, ver. 1—6. II. A promise given of the continuance of God's presence with his people upon condition of their return to, and continuance in, the instituted way of worship, and their abandoning idols and idolatry, ver. 7—12. III. A description of the altar of burnt-offerings, ver. 13—17. IV. Directions given for the consecration of that altar, ver. 18—27. Ezekiel seems here to stand between God and Israel, as Moses the servant of the Lord did when the sanctuary was first set up.

**A**FTERWARD he brought me to the gate, *even* the gate that looketh toward the east: 2 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice *was* like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. 3 And *it was* according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, *even* according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions *were* like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. 4 And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect *is* toward the east. 5 So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. 6 And I heard *him* speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me.

After Ezekiel has patiently surveyed the temple of God, the greatest glory of this earth, he is admitted to a higher form, and honoured with a sight of the glories of the upper world; it is said to him, *Come up hither*. He has seen the temple, and sees it to be very spacious and splendid; but, till the glory of God comes into it, it is but like the dead bodies he had seen in vision (*ch. xxxvii.*), that had *no breath* till the Spirit of life entered into them. Here therefore he sees the house filled with God's glory.

1. He has a vision of the *glory of God* (v. 2), the glory of the God of Israel, that God who is in covenant with Israel, and whom they serve and worship. The idols of the heathen have no glory but what they owe to the goldsmith or the painter; but this is the glory of the God of Israel. This glory came from the way of the east, and therefore he was brought to the gate that leads towards the east, to expect the appearance and approach of it. Christ's star was seen in the east, and he is that *other angel that ascends*

out of the east, Rev. vii. 2. For he is the morning star, he is the sun of righteousness. Two things he observed in this appearance of the glory of God:—1. The power of his word which he heard: *His voice was like a noise of many waters*, which is heard very far, and makes impressions; the noise of purling streams is grateful, of a roaring sea dreadful, Rev. i. 15; xiv. 2. Christ's gospel, in the glory of which he shines, was to be proclaimed aloud, the report of it to be heard far; to some it is a savour of life, to others of death, according as they are. 2. The brightness of his appearance which he saw: *The earth shone with his glory*; for God is light, and none can bear the lustre of his light, none *has seen nor can see it*. Note, That glory of God which shines in the church shines on the world. When God appeared for David *the brightness that was before him* dispersed the clouds, Ps. xviii. 12. This appearance of the glory of God to Ezekiel he observed to be the same with the vision he saw when he first received his commission (*ch. i. 4*), according to that by *the river Chebar* (*v. 3*); because God is the same, he was pleased to manifest himself in the same manner, for with him is *no variableness*. "It was the same" (says he) "as that which I saw when I came to destroy the city, that is, to foretel the city's destruction," which he did with such authority and efficacy, and the event did so certainly answer the prediction, that he might be said to destroy it. As a judge, in God's name, he passed a sentence upon it, which was soon executed. God appeared in the same manner when he sent him to speak words of terror and when he sent him to speak words of comfort; for in both God is and will be glorified. *He kills and he makes alive*; he wounds and he heals, Deut. xxxii. 39. To the same hand that destroyed we must look for deliverance. *He has smitten, and he will bind up. Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit*—The same hand inflicted the wound and healed it.

II. He has a vision of the entrance of this glory into the temple. When he saw this glory he *fell upon his face* (*v. 3*), as not able to bear the lustre of God's glory, or rather as one willing to give him the glory of it by a humble and reverent adoration. But the Spirit took him up (*v. 5*) when the *glory of the Lord had come into the house* (*v. 4*), that he might see how the house was filled with it. He saw how the glory of the Lord in this same appearance departed from the temple, because it was profaned, to his great grief; now he shall see it return to the temple to his great satisfaction. See *ch. x. 18, 19*; *xi. 23*. Note, Though God may forsake his people for a small moment, he will return with everlasting loving-kindness. God's glory filled the house as it had filled the tabernacle which Moses set up and the temple of Solomon, Exod. xl. 34; 1 Kings

viii. 10. Now we do not find that ever the Shechinah did in that manner take possession of the second temple, and therefore this was to have its accomplishment in that glory of the divine grace which shines so brightly in the gospel church, and fills it. Here is no mention of a cloud filling the house as formerly, for we now *with open face behold the glory of the Lord*, in the face of Christ, and not as of old through the cloud of types.

III. He receives instructions more immediately from the glory of the Lord, as Moses did when God had taken possession of the tabernacle (Lev. i. 1): *I heard him speaking to me out of the house, v. 6*. God's glory shining in the church, we must thence expect to receive divine oracles. *The man stood by me*; we could not bear to hear the voice of God any more than to see the face of God if Jesus Christ did not stand by us as Mediator. Or, if this was a created angel, it is observable that when God began to speak to Ezekiel he stood by and gave way, having no more to say. Nay, he stood by the prophet, as a learner with him; for *to the principalities and powers*, to the angels themselves, who desire to look into these things, *is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God*, Eph. iii. 10. The man stood by him to conduct him thither where he might receive further discoveries, *ch. xlv. 1*.

7 And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places. 8 In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger. 9 Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. 10 Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. 11 And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in there-



of, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write *it* in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. 12 This *is* the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about *shall* be most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the house.

God does here, in effect, renew his covenant with his people Israel, upon his retaking possession of the house, and Ezekiel negotiates the matter, as Moses formerly. This would be of great use to the captives at their return both for direction and encouragement; but it looks further, to those that are blessed with the privileges of the gospel-temple, that they may understand how they are before him on their good behaviour.

I. God, by the prophet, puts them in mind of their former provocations, for which they had long lain under the tokens of his displeasure. This conviction is spoken to them to make way for the comforts designed them. Though God *gives and upbraids not*, it becomes us, when he forgives, to upbraid ourselves with our unworthy conduct towards him. Let them now remember therefore, 1. That they had formerly *defiled God's holy name*, had profaned and abused all those sacred things by which he had made himself known among them, v. 7. *They and their kings* had brought contempt on the religion they professed, and their relation to God, by their spiritual whoredom, their idolatry, and by worshipping images, which they called *their kings* (for so *Moloch* signifies) or lords (for so *Baal* signifies), but which were really the *carcasses of kings*, not only lifeless and useless, but loathsome and abominable as dead carcasses, *in their high places*, set up in honour of them. They had defiled God's name by their abominations. And what were they? It was *in setting their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts*, that is, adding their own inventions to God's institutions, and urging all to a compliance with them, as if they had been of equal authority and efficacy, *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (Isa. xxix. 13); or, rather, setting up altars to their idols even in the courts of the temple, than which a more impudent affront could not be put upon the divine Majesty. Thus they set up a separation *wall between him and them*, which stopped the current of his favours to them and spoiled the acceptableness of their services to him. See what an indignity sinners do to God, setting up their walls in opposition to his, and thrusting him out from what is his right; and see what injury they do to themselves, for the nearer

any come to God with their sins the further they set him at a distance from them. Some give this sense of it: Though their houses joined close to God's house, their posts and thresholds to his, so that they were in a manner his next neighbours, *there was but a wall between me and them* (so it is in the margin), so that it might have been expected they would acquaint themselves with him and be in care to please him, yet they were not so much as neighbourly. Note, It often proves too true, *The nearer the church the further from God*. They were, by profession, in covenant with God, and yet they had *defiled the place of his throne* and of the *soles of his feet*, his temple, where he did both reside and reign. Jerusalem is called the *city of the great king* (Ps. xlviii. 2) and his *footstool*, Ps. xcix. 5; cxxxii. 7. Note, When God's ordinances are profaned his holy name is polluted. 2. That for this God had had a controversy with them in their late troubles. They could not condemn him, for he had but brought upon them the desert of their sins: *Wherefore I have consumed them in my anger*. Note, Those that pollute God's holy name fall under his just displeasure.

II. He calls upon them to repent and reform, and, in order to that, to be ashamed of their iniquities (v. 9): "*Now let them put away their whoredom*; now that they have smarted so severely for it, and now that God is returning in mercy to them and setting up his sanctuary again in the midst of them, now let them cast away their idols and have no more to do with them, that they may not again forfeit the privileges which they have been taught to know the worth of by the want of them. Let them put away their idols, those loathsome *carcasses of their kings, far from me*, from being a provocation to me." This was seasonable counsel now that the prophet had the model or pattern of the temple to set before them; for, 1. If *they see that pattern*, they will surely be ashamed of their sins (v. 10): when they see what mercy God has in store for them, notwithstanding their utter unworthiness of it, they will be ashamed to think of their disingenuous conduct towards him. Note, The goodness of God to us should lead us to repentance, especially to a penitential shame. Let *them measure the pattern* themselves, and see how much it exceeds the former pattern, and guess by that what great things God has in store for them; and surely it will put them out of countenance to think what the desert of their sins was. And then, 2. If *they be ashamed* of their sins, they shall surely see more of the pattern, v. 11. If *they be ashamed of all that they have done*, upon a general view of the goodness of God, let them have a more distinct particular account of the temple. Note, Those that improve what they see and know of the goodness of God shall see and know more of it. And then, and not till then, we are qualified for

God's favours, when we are truly humbled for our own follies. "*Show them the form of the house*; let them see what a stately structure it will be; and withal show them the ordinances and laws of it." Note, With the foresights of our comforts it is fit that we should get the knowledge of our duty; with the privileges of God's house we must acquaint ourselves with the rules of it. *Show them* these ordinances, that they may *keep them* and *do them*. Note, *Therefore* we are made to know our duty, that we may do it, and be blessed in our deed.

III. He promises that they shall be such as they should be, and then he will be to them such as they would have him to be, v. 7. 1. *The house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name*. This is pure gospel. The precept of the law says, You must not defile my name: the grace of the gospel says, You shall not. Thus what is required in the covenant is promised in the covenant, Jer. xxxii. 40. 2. *Then I will dwell in the midst of them for ever*; and the same again v. 9. God secures to us his good-will by confirming in us his good work. If we do not defile his name, we may be sure that he will not depart from us.

IV. The general law of God's house is laid down (v. 12), That, whereas formerly only the chancel, or sanctuary, was *most holy*, now the whole *mountain of the house* shall be so; the *whole limit thereof*, including all the courts and all the chambers, shall be as the most holy place, signifying that in gospel-times, 1. The whole church shall have the privilege of the *holy of holies*, that of a near access to God. All believers have now, under the gospel, *boldness to enter into the holiest* (Heb. x. 19), with this advantage, that whereas the high priest entered in the virtue of the blood of bulls and goats, we enter in the virtue of the blood of Jesus, and, wherever we are, we have through him *access to the Father*. 2. The whole church shall be under a mighty obligation to press towards the perfection of holiness, *as he who has called us is holy*. All must now be most holy. *Holiness becomes God's house* for ever, and in gospel-times more than ever. Behold this is the *law of the house*; let none expect the protection of it that will not submit to this law.

13 And these *are* the measures of the altar after the cubits: the cubit *is* a cubit and a hand-breadth; even the bottom *shall be* a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about *shall be* a span: and this *shall be* the higher place of the altar. 14 And from the bottom *upon* the ground *even* to the lower settle *shall be* two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from

the lesser settle *even* to the greater settle *shall be* four cubits, and the breadth *one* cubit. 15 So the altar *shall be* four cubits; and from the altar and upward *shall be* four horns. 16 And the altar *shall be* twelve *cubits* long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof. 17 And the settle *shall be* fourteen *cubits* long and fourteen broad in the four squares thereof; and the border about it *shall be* half a cubit; and the bottom thereof *shall be* a cubit about; and his stairs shall look toward the east. 18 And he said unto me, Son of man, Thus saith the Lord God; These *are* the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. 19 And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord God, a young bullock for a sin-offering. 20 And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put *it* on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it. 21 Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin-offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary. 22 And on the second day thou shalt offer a kid of the goats without blemish for a sin-offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they did cleanse *it* with the bullock. 23 When thou hast made an end of cleansing *it*, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. 24 And thou shalt offer them before the LORD, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up *for* a burnt-offering unto the LORD. 25 Seven days shalt thou prepare every day a goat *for* a sin-offering: they shall also prepare a young bullock, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. 26 Seven days shall they purge the altar, and purify it; and they shall consecrate themselves. 27 And when these days are expired, it shall be, *that* upon the eighth day,



and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt-offerings upon the altar, and your peace-offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord God.

This relates to the altar in this mystical temple, and that is mystical too; for Christ is our altar. The Jews, after their return out of captivity, had an altar long before they had a temple, Ezra iii. 3. But this was an altar in the temple. Now here we have,

I. The measures of the altar, v. 13. It was six yards square at the top and seven yards square at the bottom; it was four yards and a half high; it had a lower bench or shelf, here called a *settle*, a yard from the ground, on which some of the priests stood to minister, and another two yards above that, on which others of them stood, and these were each of them half a yard broad, and had ledges on either side, that they might stand firmly upon them. The sacrifices were killed at the table spoken of before, ch. xl. 39. What was to be burnt on the altar was given up to those on the lower bench, and handed by them to those on the higher, and they laid it on the altar. Thus in the service of God we must be assistant to one another.

II. The ordinances of the altar. Directions are here given, 1. Concerning the dedication of the altar at first. *Seven days* were to be spent in the dedication of it, and every day sacrifices were to be offered upon it, and particularly a goat for a *sin-offering* (v. 25), besides a young bullock for a *sin-offering* on the first day (v. 19), which teaches us in all our religious services to have an eye to Christ the great sin-offering. Neither our persons nor our performances can be acceptable to God unless sin be taken away, and that cannot be taken away but by the blood of Christ, which both sanctifies the altar (for Christ entered by his own blood, Heb. ix. 12) and the gift upon the altar. There were also to be a *bullock* and a *ram* offered for a *burnt-offering* (v. 24), which was intended purely for the glory of God, to teach us to have an eye to that in all our services; we present ourselves as living sacrifices, and our devotions as spiritual sacrifices, that we and they may be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory. The dedication of the altar is here called the *cleansing* and *purging* of it, v. 20, 26. Christ, our altar, though he had no pollution to be cleansed from, yet sanctified himself (John xvii. 19); and when we consecrate the altars of our hearts to God, to have the fire of holy love always burning upon them, we must see that they be purified and cleansed from the love of the world and the lusts of the flesh. It is observable that there are several differences between the rites of dedication here and those which were appointed Exod. xxix., to intimate that the ceremonial institutions were mutable things, and the changes in them were earnest of their period in Christ. Only

here, according to the general law, that all the sacrifices must be seasoned with salt (Lev. ii. 13), particular orders are given (v. 24) that the priests shall *cast salt upon the sacrifices*. *Grace* is the salt with which all our religious performances must be seasoned, Col. iv. 6. An everlasting covenant is called a *covenant of salt*, because it is incorruptible. The *glory* reserved for us is incorruptible and undefiled; and the *grace* wrought in us is the hidden man of the heart in that *which is not corruptible*. 2. Concerning the constant use that should be made of it, when it was dedicated: *Henceforward* the priests shall *make their burnt-offerings and peace-offerings upon this altar* (v. 27), for *therefore* it was *sanctified*, that it might *sanctify the gift* that was offered upon it. Observe further, (1.) Who were to serve at the altar: *The priests of the seed of Zadok*, v. 19. That family was substituted in the room of Abiathar by Solomon, and God confirms it. His name signifies *righteous*, for they are the righteous seed that are priests to God, through Christ *the Lord our righteousness*. (2.) How they should prepare for this service (v. 26): *They shall consecrate themselves, shall fill their hand* with the offerings, in token of the giving up of themselves with their offerings to God and to his service. Note, Before we minister to the Lord in holy things we must consecrate ourselves by getting our hands and hearts filled with those things. (3.) How they should speed in it (v. 27): *I will accept you*. And if God now accept our works, if our services be pleasing to him, it is enough, we need no more. Those that give themselves to God shall be accepted of God, their persons first and then their performances, through the Mediator.

#### CHAP. XLIV.

In this chapter we have, I. The appropriating of the east gate of the temple to the prince, ver. 1—3. II. A reproof sent to the house of Israel for their former profanations of God's sanctuary, with a charge to them to be more strict for the future, ver. 4—9. III. The degrading of those Levites that had formerly been guilty of idolatry and the establishing of the priesthood in the family of Zadok, which had kept their integrity, ver. 10—16. IV. Divers laws and ordinances concerning the priests, ver. 17—31.

**T**HEN he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it *was* shut. 2 Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. 3 *It is* for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of *that* gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.

The prophet is here brought to review what he had before once surveyed; for, though we have often looked into the things of God,

they will yet bear to be looked over again, such a copiousness there is in them. The lessons we have learned we should still repeat to ourselves. Every time we review the sacred fabric of holy things, which we have in the scriptures, we shall still find something new which we did not before take notice of. The prophet is brought a third time to the east gate, and finds it shut, which intimates that the rest of the gates were open at all times to the worshippers. But such an account is given of this gate's being shut as puts honour, 1. Upon the God of Israel. It is for the honour of him that the gate of the inner court, at which his glory entered when he took possession of the house, was ever after kept shut, and no man was allowed to enter in by it, v. 2. The difference ever after made between this and the other gates, that this was shut when the others were open, was intended both to perpetuate the remembrance of the solemn entrance of the glory of the Lord into the house (which it would remain a traditional evidence of the truth of) and also to possess the minds of people with a reverence for the Divine Majesty, and with very awful thoughts of his transcendent glory, which was designed in God's charge to Moses at the bush, *Put off thy shoe from off thy foot*. God will have a way by himself. 2. Upon the prince of Israel, v. 3. It is an honour to him that though he may not enter in by this gate, for no man may, yet, (1.) He shall sit in this gate to eat his share of the peace-offerings, that sacred food, before the Lord. (2.) He shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, by some little door or wicket, either in the gate or adjoining to it, which is called the way of the porch. This was to signify that God puts some of his glory upon magistrates, upon the princes of his people, for he has said, *You are gods*. Some by the prince here understand the high priest, or the sagan or second priest; and that he only was allowed to enter by this gate, for he was God's representative. Christ is the high priest of our profession, who entered himself into the holy place, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

4 Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face. 5 And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. 6 And thou shalt say to the rebellious, *even*

to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, 7 In that ye have brought *into my sanctuary* strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, *even* my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations. 8 And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves. 9 Thus saith the Lord God; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that *is* among the children of Israel.

This is much to the same purport with what we had in the beginning of *ch. xliii*. As the prophet must look again upon what he had before seen, so he must be told again what he had before heard. Here, as before, he sees the house filled with the glory of the Lord, which strikes an awe upon him, so that he falls prostrate at the sight, the humblest posture of adoration and the expression of a holy awe: *I fell upon my face*, v. 4. Note, The more we see of the glory of God the more low we shall lie in our own eyes. Now here,

I. God charges the prophet to take a very particular notice of all he saw, and all that was said to him (v. 5): "*Mark well*, set thy heart, apply thy mind, to the discoveries now made thee." 1. "*Behold with thy eyes* what is shown thee, particularly the entering in of the house and every going forth of it, all the inlets and all the outlets of the sanctuary;" those he must take special notice of. Note, In acquainting ourselves with divine things we must not aim so much at an abstract speculation of the things themselves as at finding the plain appointed way of converse and communion with those things, that we may go in and out and find pasture. 2. *Hear with thy ears all that I say unto thee about the laws and ordinances of the house*, which he was to instruct the people in. Note, Those who are appointed to be teachers have need to be very diligent careful learners, that they may neither forget any of the things they are entrusted with nor mistake concerning them.

II. He sends him upon an errand to the people, to the rebellious, *even to the house of Israel*, v. 6. It is sad to think that the house of Israel should deserve this character from him who perfectly knew them, that a people in covenant with God should be rebellious against him. Who are his subjects if the



house of Israel be rebels? But it is an instance of God's rich mercy that, though they had been *rebellious*, yet, being the *house of Israel*, he does not cast them off, but sends an ambassador to them, to invite and encourage them to return to their allegiance, which he would not have done if he had been pleased to kill them. The whole race of mankind has fallen under the character here given of the house of Israel; but our Lord Jesus, when he ascended on high, received gifts for men, *yea, even for the rebellious also, that, as here, the Lord God might dwell among them*, Ps. lxxviii. 18.

1. He must tell them of their faults, must show them their rebellions, must show the house of Jacob their sins. Note, Those that are sent to comfort God's people must first convince them, and so prepare them for comfort. *Let it suffice you of all your abominations*, v. 6. Note, It is time for those that have continued long in sin to reckon it long enough, and too long, and to begin to think of taking up in time, and leaving off their evil courses. *"Let the time past of your lives suffice, for by this time, surely, you have surfeited upon your abominations and have become sick of them,"* 1 Pet. iv.

3. That which is here charged upon them is, (1.) That they had admitted those to the privileges of the sanctuary that were not entitled to them; whereas God had said, *The stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death*, they had not only connived at the intrusion of strangers into the sanctuary, but had themselves introduced them (v. 7): *You brought in strangers uncircumcised in flesh*, and therefore under a legal incapacity to enter into the sanctuary, which was a *breaking of the covenant* of circumcision, throwing down the hedge of their peculiarity, and laying themselves in common with the rest of the world. Yet if these strangers had been devout and good, though they were not circumcised, the crime would not have been so great; but they were *uncircumcised in heart* too, unhumbled, unreformed, and strangers indeed to God and all goodness. When they came to offer sacrifice they brought these with them to feast with them upon the sacrifice, because they were fond of their company, and this was one of their abominations, wherewith they *polluted God's sanctuary*; it was *giving that which was holy unto dogs*, Matt. vii. 6. Note, The admission of those who are openly wicked and profane to special ordinances is a polluting of God's sanctuary and a great provocation to him. (2.) That they had employed those in the service of the sanctuary who were not fit for it. Though none but priests and Levites were to minister in the sanctuary, yet we may suppose that all who were priests and Levites did not immediately attend there, but chosen men of them, who were best qualified, who were most wise, serious, and conscientious, and most likely to keep the charge of the holy

things carefully; but, in making this choice, they had not regard to merit and qualification for the work: *"You have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves, such as you had some favour or affection for, such as you either had got, or hoped to get, money by, or such as would comply with your humours and would dispense with the laws of the sanctuary to please you; thus you have not kept the charge of my holy things."* Note, Those who have the choice of the keepers of the holy things, if, to serve some secular selfish purpose, they choose such as are unfit and unfaithful, will justly have it laid at their door, that they have betrayed the holy things by lodging them in bad hands.

2. He must tell them their duty (v. 9): *"No stranger shall enter into my sanctuary till he has first submitted to the laws of it."* But, lest any should think that this excluded the penitent believing Gentiles from the church, the stranger here is described to be one that is *uncircumcised in heart*, not in sincerity consenting to the covenant, nor putting away the filth of the flesh; whereas the believing Gentiles were *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands*, Col. ii. 11. This circumcision of the heart, in the *spirit*, not in the *letter*, was what the unbelieving Jews were strangers to and unconcerned about, while yet they were zealous to keep out of the sanctuary uncircumcised Gentiles, witness their rage against Paul when they did but suspect him to have brought *Greeks into the temple*, Acts xxi. 28.

10 And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. 11 Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, *having* charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt-offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. 12 Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity. 13 And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy *place*: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. 14 But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof,

and for all that shall be done therein. 15 But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God: 16 They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.

The Master of the house, being about to set up house again, takes account of his servants the priests, and sees who are fit to be turned out of their places and who to be kept in, and takes a course with them accordingly.

I. Those who have been treacherous are degraded and put lower those Levites—or priests who were carried down the stream of the apostasy of Israel formerly, who *went astray from God after their idols* (v. 10), who had complied with the idoltrous kings of Israel or Judah, who *ministered to them before their idols* (v. 12), bowed with them in the house of Rimmon, or set up altars for them, as Urijah did for Ahaz, and so *caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity*, led them to sin and hardened them in sin; for, if the priests go astray, many will follow *their pernicious ways*. Perhaps in Babylon some of the Jewish priests had complied with the idolaters of the place, to the great scandal of their religion. Now these priests who had thus prevaricated were justly put under the mark of God's displeasure; or, if they were dead (as it is probable that they were, if the crime were committed before the captivity), the iniquity was visited upon their children. Or perhaps it was the whole family of Abiathar that had been guilty of this trespass, which was now called to account for it. And, 1. They are sentenced to be deprived, in part, of their office, and from the dignity of priests are put down into the condition of ordinary Levites. God has *lifted up his hand against them*, has said it, and sworn it, that *they shall bear their iniquity* (v. 12); assuredly they shall suffer for it, shall suffer disgrace for it; *they shall bear their shame* (v. 13), for though they have (we charitably hope) repented of it, *yet they shall not come near to do the office of a priest*, that is, those parts of the office that were peculiar to them, they shall not come near to *any of the holy things* within the sanctuary, v. 13. Note, those who have robbed God of his honour will justly be deprived of their honour. And it is really a great punishment to be forbidden to come near to God; and justly might those who have once gone away from him be rejected as unworthy ever to come near to him and put at an everlasting distance. 2. Yet there is a mixture of mercy in this

sentence. God deals not in severity, as he might have done, with those who had dealt treacherously with him, but mitigates the sentence, v. 11, 14. They are deprived but in part, *ab officio*—of their office, and, it should seem, not at all *à beneficio*—of their emoluments. They shall help to *slay the sacrifice*, which the Levites were permitted to do, and which in this temple was done, not at the altar, but *at the tables*, ch. xl. 39. They shall be porters *at the gates of the house*, and they shall be *keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof*. Note, Those who may not be fit to be employed in one kind of service may yet be fit to be employed in another; and even those who have offended may yet be made use of, and not quite thrown aside, much less thrown away.

II. Those who have been faithful are honoured and established, v. 15, 16. These are remarkably distinguished from the other: "*But the sons of Zadok, who kept their integrity in a time of general apostasy, who went not astray when others did, they shall come near to me, shall come near to my table.*" Note, God will put marks of honour upon those who give proofs of their fidelity and constancy to him in shaking trying times, and will employ those in his service who have kept close to his service when others deserted it and drew back. And it ought to be reckoned a true and great reward of stability in duty to be established in it. If we keep close to God, God will keep us close to him.

17 And it shall come to pass, *that* when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, whiles they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. 18 They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not *gird themselves* with any thing that causeth sweat. 19 And when they go forth into the utter court, *even* into the utter court to the people, they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers, and they shall put on other garments; and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments. 20 Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads. 21 Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court. 22 Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of



the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before. 23 And they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. 24 And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; *and* they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths. 25 And they shall come at no dead person to defile themselves: but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that hath had no husband, they may defile themselves. 26 And after he is cleansed, they shall reckon unto him seven days. 27 And in the day that he goeth into the sanctuary, unto the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, saith the Lord God. 28 And it shall be unto them for an inheritance: I *am* their inheritance: and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I *am* their possession. 29 They shall eat the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be their's. 30 And the first of all the firstfruits of all *things*, and every oblation of all, of every *sort* of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that ye may cause the blessing to rest in thine house. 31 The priests shall not eat of any thing that is dead of itself, or torn, whether it be fowl or beast.

God's priests must be *regulars*, not *seculars*; and therefore here are rules laid down for them to govern themselves by and due encouragement given them to live up to those rules. Directions are here given,

I. Concerning their clothes; they must wear *linen garments* when they *went in to minister* or do any service in the inner court, or in the sanctuary, and nothing that was *woollen*, because it would *cause sweat*, v. 17, 18. They must dress themselves cool, that they might go the more readily about their work; and they had the more need to do so because they were to attend the altars, which had constant fires upon them. And they must dress themselves clean and sweet, and avoid every thing that was sweaty and filthy, to signify the purity of mind with

which the service of God is to be attended to. Sweat came in with sin and was part of the curse. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.* Clothes came in with sin, coats of skins did; and therefore the priests must use as little and as light clothing as possible, and not such as caused sweat. When they had finished their service they must change their clothes again, and lay up their linen garments in the chambers appointed for that purpose, v. 19, as before, ch. xlii. 14. They must not go among the people with their holy garments on, lest they should imagine themselves sanctified by the touch of them; or, *They shall sanctify the people*, that is (as it is explained, ch. xlii. 14), they shall *approach to those things which are for the people*, in their ordinary garments.

II. Concerning their hair; in that they must avoid extremes on both hands (v. 20): *They must not shave their heads*, in imitation of the Gentile priests, and as the priests of the Romish church do; nor, on the other hand, must they *suffer their locks to grow long*, as the *beaux*, or that they might be thought Nazarites, when really they were not; but they must be grave and modest, must *poll their heads* and keep their hair short. If a man, especially a minister, wear *long hair*, it is not becoming (1 Cor. xi. 14); it is effeminate.

III. Concerning their diet; they must be sure to *drink no wine* when they went in to minister, lest they should drink to excess, should drink and forget the law, v. 21. *It is not for kings to drink wine*, more than will do them good, much less for priests. See Lev. x. 9; Prov. xxxi. 4, 5.

IV. Concerning their marriages, v. 22. Here they must consult the credit of their office, and not marry one that had been *divorced*, that was at least under the suspicion of immodesty, nor a *widow*, unless she were a priest's widow, that had been accustomed to the usages of the priests' families. Others may do that which ministers may not do, but must deny themselves in, in honour of their character. Their wives as well as themselves must be of good report.

V. Concerning their preaching and church-government. 1. It was part of their business to teach the people; and herein they must approve themselves both skilful and faithful (v. 23): *They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane*, between good and evil, lawful and unlawful, that they may neither scruple what is lawful nor venture upon what is unlawful, that they may not pollute what is holy nor pollute themselves with what is profane. Ministers must take pains to cause *people to discern between the clean and the unclean*, that they may not confound the distinctions between right and wrong, nor mistake concerning them, so as to *put darkness for light and light for darkness*, but may have a good judgment of discretion concerning their own actions. 2. It was part of their business to judge

upon appeals made to them (Deut. xvii. 8, 9); and in *controversy they shall stand in judgment*, v. 24. They shall have the honesty to stand up for what is right, and, when they have passed a right judgment, shall have the courage to stand to it and stand by it. They must judge, not according to their own fancies, or inclinations, or secular interests, but *according to my judgments*; that must be their rule and standard. Note, Ministers must decide controversies according to the word of God, *to the law and to the testimony*. *Sit liber judex—Let the judge be unbiassed*. Their business is to keep courts in God's name, to preside in the congregations of his people. And herein they must go to the statute-book: 'They shall *keep my statutes in all my assemblies*'. God calls the assemblies of his people *his assemblies*, because they are held in his name, to his glory. Ministers are the masters of those assemblies, are to preside in them, and in all their acts must keep close to God's laws. Another part of their work, as church governors, is to *hallow God's sabbaths*, to do the public work of that day with a becoming care and reverence, as the work of a holy day should be done, and to see that God's people also sanctify that day and do nothing to pollute it.

VI. Concerning their mourning for dead relations; the rule here agrees with the law of Moses, Lev. xxi. 1, 11. A priest shall not come near any *dead body* (for they must be purified *from dead works*) except of his next relations, v. 25. Decent expressions of a pious sorrow for dear relations, when they are removed by death, are not disagreeable to the character of a minister. Yet by this approach to the dead body of a relation they contracted a ceremonial pollution, from which they must be cleansed by a *sin-offering* before they went in again to minister, v. 26, 27. Note, Though sorrow for the dead is very allowable and commendable, yet there is danger of sinning in it, either by excess or dissimulation; and those tears have too often need to be *wept over again*.

VII. Concerning their maintenance; they must live upon the altar at which they served, and live comfortably (v. 28): "*You shall give them no possession in Israel, no lands or tenements, lest they should be entangled with the affairs of this life;*" for God has said, *I am their inheritance*, and they need no other in reserve; *I am their possession*, and they need no other in hand. Some land was allowed them (*ch. xlviii. 10*), but their principal subsistence was by their office. What God appropriated to himself they were the receivers of, for their own proper use and behoof; they lived upon the holy things, and so God himself was the portion both of their inheritance and of their cup. Note, Those who have God for their inheritance and their possession may be content with a little, and ought not to covet a great deal of the possessions and inheritances

of this earth. If we have God, we have *all*; and therefore may well reckon that we have enough. Observe,

1. What the priests were to have from the people, for their maintenance and encouragement. (1.) They must have the flesh of many of the offerings, the *sin-offering and trespass-offering*, which would supply them and their families with flesh-meat, and the *meat-offerings*, which would supply them with bread. What we offer to God will redound to our own advantage. (2.) They must have every dedicated devoted thing in Israel, which was in many cases to be turned into money and given to the priest. This is explained, v. 30. *Every oblation or free-will-offering* (which in times of reformation and devotion would be many and considerable) *of all, of every sort of your oblations, shall be the priest's*. We have the law concerning them Lev. xxvii. (3.) They were to have *the first of the dough* when it was going to the oven, as well as the first of their fruits when they were going to the barn. God, who is the first, must have the first; and, if it belong to him, his priests must have it. We may *then* comfortably enjoy what we have, when a share of it has been first set apart for works of piety and charity. To this the apostle's rule bears some analogy, to *begin the week* with laying by for pious uses, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. The priests being so well provided for, it would be inexcusable in them if they (contrary to the law which every Israelite is bound by) should *eat that which is torn or which died of itself*, v. 31. Those that were in want of necessary food might perhaps expect to be dispensed with in such a case. Poverty has its temptations, but the priests were so well provided for that they could have no pretence for it.

2. What the people might expect from the priest for their recompence. 'Those that are kind to a prophet, to a priest, shall have a prophet's, a priest's reward: *That he may cause the blessing to rest in thy house* (v. 30), that God may cause it by commanding it, that the priest may cause it by praying for it; and it was part of the priest's work to *bless the people in the name of the Lord*, not only their congregations, but their families. Note, It is all in all to the comfort of any house to have the blessing of God upon it and to have the blessing to rest in it, to dwell where we dwell and to attend the entail of it upon those that shall come after us. And the way to have the blessing of God abide upon our estates is to honour God with them, and to give him and his ministers, him and his poor, their share out of them. God blesses, he surely blesses, the habitation of those who are thus just, Prov. iii. 33. And ministers, by instructing and praying for the families that are kind to them, should do their part towards causing the blessing to rest there. *Peace be to this house*.



## CHAP. XLV.

In this chapter is further represented to the prophet, in vision, I. The division of the holy land, so much for the temple, and the priests that attended the service of it (ver. 1-4), so much for the Levites (ver. 5), so much for the city (ver. 6), so much for the prince, and the residue to the people, ver. 7, 8. II. The ordinances of justice that were given both to prince and people, ver. 9-12. III. The oblations they were to offer, and the prince's part in those oblations, ver. 13-17. Particularly in the beginning of the year (ver. 18-20) and in the passover, and the feast of tabernacles, ver. 21-25. And all this seems to point at the new church-state that should be set up under the gospel, which, both for extent and for purity, should far exceed that of the Old Testament.

**M**OREOVER, when ye shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, ye shall offer an oblation unto the LORD, a holy portion of the land: the length *shall be* the length of five and twenty thousand *reeds*, and the breadth *shall be* ten thousand. This *shall be* holy in all the borders thereof round about. 2 Of this there shall be for the sanctuary five hundred *in length*, with five hundred *in breadth*, square round about; and fifty cubits round about for the suburbs thereof. 3 And of this measure shalt thou measure the length of five and twenty thousand, and the breadth of ten thousand: and in it shall be the sanctuary *and* the most holy place. 4 The holy *portion* of the land shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, which shall come near to minister unto the LORD: and it shall be a place for their houses, and a holy place for the sanctuary. 5 And the five and twenty thousand of length, and the ten thousand of breadth, shall also the Levites, the ministers of the house, have for themselves, for a possession for twenty chambers. 6 And ye shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and five and twenty thousand long, over against the oblation of the holy *portion*: it shall be for the whole house of Israel. 7 And a *portion shall be* for the prince on the one side and on the other side of the oblation of the holy *portion*, and of the possession of the city, before the oblation of the holy *portion*, and before the possession of the city, from the west side westward, and from the east side eastward: and the length *shall be* over against one of the portions, from the west border unto the east border. 8 In the land shall be his possession in Israel: and my

princes shall no more oppress my people; and *the rest* of the land shall they give to the house of Israel according to their tribes.

Directions are here given for the dividing of the land after their return to it; and, God having warranted them to do it, it would be an act of faith, and not of folly, thus to divide it before they had it. And it would be welcome news to the captives to hear that they should not only return to their own land, but that, whereas they were now but few in number, they should *increase and multiply*, so as to *replenish* it. But this never had its accomplishment in the Jewish state after the return out of captivity, but was to be fulfilled in the model of the Christian church, which was perfectly new (as this division of the land was quite different from that in Joshua's time) and much enlarged by the accession of the Gentiles to it; and it will be perfected in the heavenly kingdom, of which the land of Canaan had always been a type. Now, 1. Here is the portion of land assigned to *the sanctuary*, in the midst of which the temple was to be built, with all its courts and purlieus; the rest round about it was for the priests. This is called (v. 1) *an oblation to the Lord*; for what is given in works of piety, for the maintenance and support of the worship of God and the advancement of religion, God accepts as given to him, if it be done with a single eye. It is a *holy portion of the land*, which is to be set out first, as the *first-fruits* that sanctify the lump. The appropriating of lands for the support of religion and the ministry is an act of piety that bids as fair for perpetuity, and the benefit of posterity, as any. This *holy portion of the land* was to be measured, and the borders of it fixed, that the sanctuary itself might not have more than its share and in time engross the whole land. So far the lands of the church shall extend and no further; as in our own kingdom donations to the church were of old limited by the *statute of mortmain*. The lands here allotted to the sanctuary were 25,000 *reeds* (so our translation makes it, though some make them only *cubits*) in length, and 10,000 in breadth—about eighty miles one way and thirty miles another way (say some); twenty-five miles one way and ten miles the other way, so others. The priests and Levites that were to come near to minister were to have their dwellings in this *portion of the land* that was round about the sanctuary, that they might be near their work; whereas by the distribution of the land in Joshua's time the cities of the priests and Levites were dispersed all the nation over. This intimates that gospel ministers should reside upon their charge; where their service lies there must they live. 2. Next to the lands of the sanctuary the city-lands are assigned, in which the holy

city was to be built, and with the issues and profits of which the citizens were to be maintained (v. 6): *It shall be for the whole house of Israel*, not appropriated, as before, to one tribe or two, but some of all the tribes shall dwell in the city, as we find they did, Neh. xi. 1, 2. The portion for the city was fully as long, but only half as broad, as that for the sanctuary; for the city was enriched by trade and therefore had the less need of lands. 3. The next allotment after the church-lands and the city-lands is of the crown-lands, v. 7, 8. Here is no admeasurement of these, but they are said to lie *on the one side and on the other side* of the church-lands and city-lands, to intimate that the prince with his wealth and power was to be a protection to both. Some make the prince's share equal to the church's and city's share both together; others make it to be a thirteenth part of the rest of the land, the other twelve parts being for the twelve tribes. The prince that attends continually to the administration of public affairs must have wherewithal to support his dignity, and have abundance, that he may not be in temptation to oppress the people, which yet with many does not prevent that; but the grace of God shall prevent it, for it is promised here, *My princes shall no more oppress my people*; for God will make the *officers peace* and the *exactors righteousness*. Notwithstanding this, we find that after the return of the Jews to their own land the princes were complained of for their exactions. But Nehemiah was one that did not do as the *former governors*, and yet kept a handsome court, Neh. v. 15, 18. But so much is said of the prince in this mystical holy state, to intimate that in the gospel-church magistrates should be as *nursing fathers* to it and Christian princes its patrons and protectors; and the holy religion they profess, as far as they are subject to the power of it, will restrain them from oppressing God's people, because they are more his people than theirs. 4. The rest of the lands were to be distributed to the people *according to their tribes*, who had reason to think themselves well settled, when they had both the *testimony of Israel* and the *throne of judgment* so near them.

9 Thus saith the Lord God; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord God. 10 Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath. 11 The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: the measure thereof shall

be after the homer. 12 And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs: twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, fifteen shekels, shall be your maneh.

We have here some general rules of justice laid down both for prince and people, the rules of distributive and commutative justice; for godliness without honesty is but a form of godliness, will neither please God nor avail to the benefit of any people. Be it therefore enacted, by the authority of the church's King and God, 1. That *princes do not oppress their subjects*, but duly and faithfully administer justice among them (v. 9): "*Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel*" that you have been oppressive to the people and have enriched yourselves by spoil and violence, that you have so long fleeced the flock instead of feeding them, and henceforward do so no more." Note, Even princes and great men that have long done amiss must at length think it time, high time, to reform and amend; for no prescription will justify a wrong. Instead of saying that they have been long accustomed to oppress, and therefore may persist in it, for the custom will bear them out, they should say that they have been long accustomed to it and therefore, as here, *Let the time past suffice*, and let them now remove *violence and spoil*; let them drop wrongful demands, cancel wrongful usages, and turn out those from employments under them that do violence. Let them *take away their exactions*, ease their subjects of those taxes which they find lie heavily upon them, and let them *execute judgment and justice* according to law, as the duty of their place requires. Note, All princes, but especially the princes of Israel, are concerned to do justice; for of their people God says, *They are my people*, and they in a special manner *rule for God*. 2. That one neighbour do not cheat another in commerce (v. 10): *You shall have just balances*, in which to weigh both money and goods, a *just ephah* for dry measure of corn and flour, a *just bath* for the measure of liquids, wine, and oil; and the *ephah* and *bath* shall be *one measure*, the tenth part of a *homer*, or *cor*, v. 11. So that the ephah and bath contained (as the learned Dr. Cumberland has computed) seven wine gallons and four pints, and something more. An omer was but the tenth part of an ephah (Exod. xvi. 36) and the one hundredth part of a *homer*, or *homer*, and contained about six pints. The *shekel* is here settled (v. 13); it is twenty *gerahs*, just half a *Roman* ounce, in our money 2s. 4½d. and almost the eighth part of a farthing, as the aforesaid learned man exactly computes it. By the shekels the *maneh*, or pound, was reckoned, which, when it was set for a mere weight (says bishop Cumberland), without respect to coinage, contained just 100 shekels, as appears by comparing 1 Kings x. 17, where it



is said three *manehs*, or pounds, of gold, went to one shield, with the parallel place, 2 Chron. ix. 16, where it is said 300 *shekels of gold went to one shield*. But when the *maneh* is set for a sum of money or coin it contains but sixty shekels, as appears here, where twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, and fifteen shekels, which in all make sixty, shall be the *maneh*. But it is thus reckoned because they had one piece of money that weighed twenty shekels, another twenty-five, another fifteen, all of which made up one pound, as a learned writer here observes. Note, It concerns God's Israel to be very honest and just in all their dealings, very punctual and exact in rendering to all their due, and very cautious to do wrong to none, because otherwise they spoil the acceptableness of their profession with God and the reputation of it before men.

13 This *is* the oblation that ye shall offer; the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of wheat, and ye shall give the sixth part of an ephah of a homer of barley: 14 Concerning the ordinance of oil, the bath of oil, *ye shall offer* the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, *which is* a homer of ten baths; for ten baths *are* a homer: 15 And one lamb out of the flock, out of two hundred, out of the fat pastures of Israel; for a meat-offering, and for a burnt-offering, and for peace-offerings, to make reconciliation for them, saith the Lord God. 16 All the people of the land shall give this oblation for the prince in Israel. 17 And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin-offering, and the meat-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel. 18 Thus saith the Lord God; In the first month, in the first day of the month, thou shalt take a young bullock without blemish, and cleanse the sanctuary: 19 And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin-offering, and put it upon the posts of the house, and upon the four corners of the settle of the altar, and upon the posts of the gate of the inner court. 20 And so thou shalt do the seventh day of the month for every

one that erreth, and for *him that is* simple: so shall ye reconcile the house. 21 In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. 22 And upon that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bullock for a sin-offering. 23 And seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt-offering to the Lord, seven bullocks and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a kid of the goats daily for a sin-offering. 24 And he shall prepare a meat-offering of an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil for an ephah. 25 In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, shall he do the like in the feast of the seven days, according to the sin-offering, according to the burnt-offering, and according to the meat-offering, and according to the oil.

Having laid down the rules of righteousness towards men, which is really a branch of true religion, he comes next to give some directions for their religion towards God, which is a branch of universal righteousness.

I. It is required that they offer an oblation to the Lord out of what they have (v. 13): *All the people of the land* must give an oblation, v. 16. As God's tenants, they must pay a quitrent to their great landlord. They had offered an oblation out of their real estates (v. 1), a *holy portion of their land*; now they are directed to offer an oblation out of their personal estates, their goods and chattels, as an acknowledgment of their receivings from him, their dependence on him, and their obligations to him. Note, Whatever our substance is we must honour God with it, by giving him his dues out of it. Not that God has need of or may be benefited by any thing that we can give him, Ps. l. 9. No; it is but an *oblation*; we only offer it to him; the benefit of it returns back to ourselves, to his poor, who, as our neighbours, are ourselves, or to his ministers who serve continually for our good.

II. The proportion of this oblation is here determined, which was not done by the law of Moses. No mention is made of the tithe, but only of this oblation. And the *quantum* of this is thus settled:—1. Out of their corn they were to offer a sixtieth part; out of every homer of wheat and barley, which contained ten ephahs, they were to offer the sixth part of one ephah, which was a sixtieth part of the whole, v. 13. 2. Out of their oil (and probably their wine too) they were to

offer a hundredth part, for this oblation; out of every cor, or homer, which contained ten baths, they were to offer the tenth part of one bath, v. 14. This was given to the altar; for in every meat-offering there was *flour mingled with oil*. 3. Out of their flocks they were to give *one lamb* out of 200; that was the smallest proportion of all, v. 15. But it must be *out of the fat pastures of Israel*. They must not offer to God that which was taken up from the common, but the fattest and best they had, for *burnt-offerings* and *peace-offerings*: the former were offered for the giving of glory to God, the latter for the fetching in of mercy, grace, and peace, from God, and in our spiritual sacrifices these are our two great errands at the throne of grace; but, in order to the acceptance of both, these sacrifices were to *make reconciliation* for them. Christ is our sacrifice of atonement, by whom reconciliation is made, and to him we must have an eye in our sacrifices of acknowledgment.

III. This oblation must be given *for the prince in Israel*, v. 16. Some read it to the prince, and understand it of Christ, who is indeed the prince in Israel, to whom we must offer our oblations, and into whose hands we must put them, to be presented to the Father. Or, They shall give it *with* the prince; every private person shall bring his oblation, to be offered with that of the prince; for it follows (v. 17), *It shall be the prince's part to provide* all the offerings, *to make reconciliation for the house of Israel*. The people were to bring their oblations to him according to the foregoing rules, and he was to bring them to the sanctuary, and to make up what fell short out of his own. Note, It is the duty of rulers to take care of religion, and to see that the duties of it be regularly and carefully performed by those under their charge, and that nothing be wanting that is requisite thereto: the magistrate is the keeper of both tables; and it is a happy thing when those that are above others in power and dignity go before them in the service of God.

IV. Some particular solemnities are here appointed.

1. Here is one in the beginning of the year, which seems to be altogether new, and not instituted by the law of Moses; it is the annual solemnity of cleansing the sanctuary. (1.) *On the first day of the first month* (upon new-year's day) they were to offer a sacrifice for the *cleansing of the sanctuary* (v. 18), that is, to make atonement for the iniquity of the holy things the year past, that they might bring none of the guilt of them into the services of the new year, and to implore grace for the preventing of that iniquity, and for the better performance of the service of the sanctuary the ensuing year. And, in token of this, the blood of this *sin-offering* was to be put upon the *posts* of the temple, the four corners, not of the altar, but the *settle of the altar*, and the *posts of the gate of the inner*

*court* (v. 19), to signify that by it atonement was intended to be made for the sins of all the servants that attended that house, priests, Levites, and people, even the sins that were found in all their services. Note, Even sanctuaries on earth need cleansing, frequent cleansing; that above needs none. Those that worship God together should often join in renewing their repentance for their manifold defects, and applying the blood of Christ for the pardon of them, and in renewing their covenants to be more careful for the future; and it is very seasonable to begin the year with this work, as Hezekiah did when it had been long neglected, 2 Chron. xxix. 17. They were here appointed to *cleanse the sanctuary* upon the first day of the month, because on the fourteenth day of the month they were to eat the *passover*, an ordinance which, of all Old-Testament institutions, had most in it of Christ and gospel grace, and therefore it was very fit that they should begin to prepare for it a fortnight before by cleansing the sanctuary. (2.) This sacrifice was to be repeated *on the seventh day of the first month*, v. 20. And then it was intended to make atonement *for every one that errs, and for him that is simple*. Note, He that sins *errs* and is *simple*; he mistakes, he goes out of the way, and shows himself to be foolish and unwise. But here it is spoken of those sins which are committed through ignorance, mistake, or inadvertency, whether by any of the priests, or of the Levites, or of the people. Sacrifices were appointed to atone for such sins as men were surprised into, or did before they were aware, which they would not have done if they had known and remembered aright, which they were overtaken in, and for which, afterwards, they condemn themselves. But for presumptuous sins, committed with a high hand, there was no sacrifice appointed, Num. xv. 30. By these repeated sacrifices you shall *reconcile the house*, that is, God will be reconciled to it, and continue the tokens of his presence in it, and will *let it alone this year also*.

2. The passover was to be religiously observed at the time appointed, v. 21. Christ is our *passover*, that is *sacrificed for us*. We celebrate the memorial of that sacrifice and feast upon it, triumphing in our deliverance out of the Egyptian slavery of sin and our preservation from the sword of the destroying angel, the sword of divine justice, in the Lord's supper, which is our passover-feast, as the whole Christian life is, and must be, the feast of unleavened bread. It is here appointed that the prince shall prepare a *sin-offering*, to be offered *for himself and the people*, a bullock on the *first day* (v. 22) and a *kid of the goats* every other day (v. 23), to teach us, in all our attendance upon God for communion with him, to have an eye to the great sin-offering, by which *transgression* was *finished* and an *everlasting righteousness* brought in. On every day of the feast there was



to be a *burnt-offering*, purely for the honour of God, of no less than seven bullocks and seven rams, with their meat-offering, which were wholly consumed upon the altar, and yet *no waste*, v. 23, 24.

3. The feast of tabernacles; that is spoken of next (v. 25), and there is no mention of the feast of pentecost, which came between that of the passover and that of tabernacles. Orders are here given (above what were given by the law of Moses) for the same sacrifices to be offered during the seven days of the passover. See the deficiency of the legal sacrifices for sin; they were therefore often repeated, not only every year, but every feast, every day of the feast, because *they could not make the comers thereunto perfect*, Heb. x. 1, 3. See the necessity of our frequently repeating the same religious exercises. Though the sacrifice of atonement is offered *once for all*, yet the sacrifices of acknowledgment, that of a broken heart, that of a thankful heart, those spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus, must be every day offered. We should, as here, fall into a method of holy duties, and keep to it.

CHAP. XLVI.

In this chapter we have, I. Some further rules given both to the priests and to the people, relating to their worship, ver. 1—15. II. A law concerning the prince's disposal of his inheritance, ver. 16—18. III. A description of the places provided for the boiling of the sacrifices and the baking of the meat-offerings, ver. 19—24.

**T**HUS saith the Lord God; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. 2 And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of *that* gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priest shall prepare his burnt-offering and his peace-offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. 3 Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Lord in the sabbaths and in the new moons. 4 And the burnt-offering that the prince shall offer unto the Lord in the sabbath-day *shall be* six lambs without blemish, and a ram without blemish. 5 And the meat-offering *shall be* an ephah for a ram, and the meat-offering for the lambs as he shall be able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah. 6 And in the day of the new moon *it shall be* a young bullock without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram: they

shall be without blemish. 7 And he shall prepare a meat-offering, an ephah for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs according as his hand shall attain unto, and a hin of oil to an ephah. 8 And when the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of *that* gate, and he shall go forth by the way thereof. 9 But when the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it. 10 And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in, shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth. 11 And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meat-offering shall be an ephah to a bullock, and an ephah to a ram, and to the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah. 12 Now when the prince shall prepare a voluntary burnt-offering or peace-offerings voluntarily unto the Lord, *one* shall then open him the gate that looketh toward the east, and he shall prepare his burnt-offering and his peace-offerings, as he did on the sabbath-day: then he shall go forth; and after his going forth *one* shall shut the gate. 13 Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt-offering unto the Lord *of* a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning. 14 And thou shalt prepare a meat-offering for it every morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of a hin of oil, to temper with the fine flour; a meat-offering continually by a perpetual ordinance unto the Lord. 15 Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meat-offering, and the oil, every morning *for* a continual burnt-offering.

Whether the rules for public worship here laid down were designed to be observed, even in those things wherein they differed from the law of Moses, and were so observed under the second temple, is not certain; we

find not in the history of that latter part of the Jewish church that they governed themselves in their worship by these ordinances, as one would think they should have done, but only by the law of Moses, looking upon this *then* in the next age after as mystical, and not literal. We may observe, in these verses,

I. That the place of worship was fixed, and rules were given concerning that, both to prince and people.

1. The east gate, which was kept shut at other times, was to be opened on the sabbath days, on the new moons (v. 1), and whenever the prince offered a voluntary offering, v. 12. Of the keeping of this gate ordinarily shut we read before (ch. xlv. 2); whereas the other gates of the court were opened every day, this was opened only on high days and on special occasions, when it was opened for the prince, who was to *go in by the way of the porch of that gate*, v. 2, 8. Some think he went in with the priests and Levites into the *inner court* (for into that court this gate was the entrance), and they observe that magistrates and ministers should join forces, and go the same way, hand in hand, in promoting the service of God. But it should rather seem that he did not go *through* the gate (as the glory of the Lord had done), though it was open, but he went *by the way of the porch of the gate*, stood at the *post of the gate*, and worshipped at the *threshold of the gate* (v. 2), where he had a full view of the priests' performances at the altar, and signified his concurrence in them, for himself and for the people of the land, that stood behind him at the *door of that gate*, v. 3. Thus must every prince show himself to be of David's mind, who would very willingly be a *door-keeper in the house of his God*, and, as the word there is, *lie at the threshold*, Ps. lxxxiv. 10. Note, The greatest of men are less than the least of the ordinances of God. Even princes themselves, when they draw near to God, must worship *with reverence and godly fear*, owning that even they are unworthy to approach to him. But Christ is *our prince*, whom God causes to *draw near and approach to him*, Jer. xxx. 21.

2. As to the north gate and south gate, by which they entered into the *court of the people* (not into the inner court), there was this rule given, that whoever came in at the *north gate* should go out at the *south gate*, and whoever came in at the *south gate* should go out at the *north gate*, v. 9. Some think this was to prevent thrusting and jostling one another; for God is the *God of order*, and not of confusion. We may suppose that they came in at the gate that was next their own houses, but, when they went away, God would have them go out at that gate which would lead them *the furthest way about*, that they might have time for meditation; being thereby obliged to go a great way round the

sanctuary, they might have an opportunity to *consider the palaces* of it, and, if they improved their time well in fetching this circuit, they would call it the nearest way home. Some observe that this may remind us, in the service of God, to be still pressing forward (Phil. iii. 13) and not to *look back*, and, in our attendance upon ordinances, not to go back as we came, but more holy, and heavenly, and spiritual.

3. It is appointed that *the people shall worship at the door of the east gate*, where the prince does, he at the head and they attending him, both *on the sabbath and on the new moons* (v. 3), and that, when they come in and go out, the prince shall be *in the midst of them*, v. 10. Note, Great men should, by their constant and reverent attendance on God in public worship, give a good example to their inferiors, both engaging them and encouraging them to do likewise. It is a very graceful becoming thing for persons of quality to go to church with their servants, and tenants, and poor neighbours about them, and to behave themselves there with an air of seriousness and devotion; and those who thus honour God with their honour he will delight to honour.

II. That the ordinances of worship were fixed. Though the prince is supposed himself to be a very hearty zealous friend to the sanctuary, yet it is not left to him, no, not in concert with the priests, to appoint what sacrifices shall be offered, but God himself appoints them; for it is his prerogative to institute the rites and ceremonies of religious worship. 1. Every morning, as duly as the morning came, they must offer a *lamb* for a *burnt-offering*, v. 13. It is strange that no mention is made of the evening sacrifice; but Christ having come, and having offered himself now *in the end of the world* (Heb. ix. 26), we are to look upon him as the evening sacrifice, about the time of the offering up of which he died. 2. On the sabbath days, whereas by the law of Moses four lambs were to be offered (Num. xviii. 9), it is here appointed that (at the prince's charge) there shall be *six lambs* offered, and a *ram* besides (v. 4), to intimate how much we should abound in sabbath work, now in gospel-time, and what plenty of the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise we should offer up to God on that day; and, if *with such sacrifices God is well-pleased*, surely we have a great deal of reason to be so. 3. On the new moons, in the beginning of their months, there was over and above the usual sabbath-sacrifices the additional offering of a young bullock, v. 6. Those who do much for God and their souls, steadily and constantly, must yet, upon some occasions, do still more. 4. All the sacrifices were to be *without blemish*; so Christ, the great sacrifice, was (1 Pet. i. 19), and so Christians, who are to present themselves to God as living sacrifices, should aim and endeavour



to be—blameless, and harmless, and without rebuke. 5. All the sacrifices were to have their meat-offerings annexed to them, for so the law of Moses had appointed, to show what a good table God keeps in his house and that we ought to honour him with the fruit of our ground as well as with the fruit of our cattle, because in both he has blessed us, Deut. xxviii. 4. In the beginning, Cain offered the one and Abel the other. Some observe that the meat-offerings here are much larger in proportion than they were by the law of Moses. Then the proportion was *three tenth-deals to a bullock, and two to a ram* (so many tenth parts of an ephah) and half a hin of oil at the most (Num. xv. 6—9); but here, for every bullock and every ram, a whole ephah and a whole hin of oil (v. 7), which intimates that under the gospel, the great atoning sacrifice having been offered, these unbloody sacrifices shall be more abounded in; or, in general, it intimates that as now, under the gospel, God abounds in the gifts of his grace to us, more than under the law, so we should abound in the returns of praise and duty to him. But it is observable that in the meat-offering for the lambs the prince is allowed to offer as he shall be able to give (v. 5, 7, 11), as his hand shall attain unto. Note, Princes themselves must spend as they can afford; and even in that which is laid out in works of piety God expects and requires but that we should do according to our ability, every man as God has prospered him, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. God has not made us to serve with an offering (Isa. xlii. 23), but considers our frame and state. Yet this will not countenance those who pretend a disability that is not real, or those who by their extravagances in other things disable themselves to do the good they should. And we find those praised who, in an extraordinary case of charity, went not only to their power, but beyond their power.

16 Thus saith the Lord God; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it shall be their possession by inheritance. 17 But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. 18 Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession.

We have here a law for the limiting of the power of the prince in the disposing of the

crown-lands. 1. If he have a son that is a favourite, or has merited well, he may, if he please, as a token of his favour and in recompence for his services, settle some parts of his lands upon him and his heirs for ever (v. 16), provided it do not go out of the family. There may be a cause for parents, when their children have grown up, to be more kind to one than to another, as Jacob gave to Joseph one portion above his brethren, Gen. xlviii. 22. 2. Yet, if he have a servant that is a favourite, he may not in like manner settle lands upon him, v. 17. But if he see cause he may give him lands to the year of jubilee, and then they must return to the family again, v. 17. The servant might have the rents, issues, and profits, for such a term, but the inheritance, the *jus proprietarium—the right of proprietorship*, shall remain in the prince and his heirs. It was fit that a difference should be put between a child and a servant, like that John viii. 35. *The servant abides not in the house for ever, as the son does.* 3. What estates he gives his children must be of his own (v. 18): He shall not take of the people's inheritance, under pretence of having many children to provide for; he shall not find ways to make them forfeit their estates, or to force them to sell them and so thrust his subjects out of their possession; but let him and his sons be content with their own. It is far from being a prince's honour to increase the wealth of his family and crown by encroaching upon the rights and properties of his subjects; nor will he himself be a gainer by it at last, for he will be but a poor prince when the people are scattered every man from his possession, when they quit their native country, being forced out of it by oppression, choosing rather to live among strangers that are free people, and where what they have they can call their own, be it ever so little. It is the interest of princes to rule in the hearts of their subjects, and then all they have is, in the best manner, at their service. It is better for themselves to gain their affections by protecting their rights than to gain their estates by invading them.

19 After he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy chambers of the priests, which looked toward the north: and, behold, there was a place on the two sides westward. 20 Then said he unto me, This is the place where the priests shall boil the trespass-offering and the sin-offering, where they shall bake the meat-offering; that they bear them not out into the utter court, to sanctify the people. 21 Then he brought me forth into the utter court, and caused me to pass by

the four corners of the court; and, behold, in every corner of the court *there was* a court. 22 In the four corners of the court *there were* courts joined of forty *cubits* long and thirty broad: these four corners *were* of one measure. 23 And *there was* a row of *building* round about in them, round about them four, and *it was* made with boiling-places under the rows round about. 24 Then said he unto me, These *are* the places of them that boil, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifice of the people.

We have here a further discovery of buildings about the temple, which we did not observe before, and those were places to boil the flesh of the offerings in, v. 20. He that kept such a plentiful table at his altar needed large kitchens; and a wise builder will provide conveniences of that kind. Observe, 1. Where those boiling-places were situated. There were some at the entry into the inner court (v. 19) and others under the rows, in the four corners of the outer court, v. 21—23. These were the places where, it is likely, there was most room to spare for this purpose; and this purpose was found for the spare room, that none might be lost. It is a pity that holy ground should be waste ground. 2. What use they were put to. In those places they were to *boil the trespass-offering and the sin-offering*, those parts of them which were allotted to the priests and which were more sacred than the flesh of the peace-offerings, of which the offerers also had a share. There also they were to *bake the meat-offering*, their share of it, which they had from the altar for their own tables, v. 20. Care was taken that they should not *bear them out into the outer court, to sanctify the people*. Let them not pretend to sanctify the people with this holy flesh, and so impose upon them; or let not the people imagine that by touching these sacred things they were sanctified, and made any the better or more acceptable to God. It should seem (from Hag. ii. 12) that there were those who had such a conceit; and therefore the priests must not carry any of the holy flesh away with them, lest they should encourage that conceit. Ministers must take heed of doing any thing to bolster up ignorant people in their superstitious vanities.

## CHAP. XLVII.

In this chapter we have, I. The vision of the holy waters, their rise, extent, depth, and healing virtue, the plenty of fish in them, and an account of the trees growing on the banks of them, ver. 1—12. II. An appointment of the borders of the land of Canaan, which was to be divided by lot to the tribes of Israel and the strangers that sojourned among them, ver. 13—23.

**A**FTERWARD he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from

under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house *stood toward* the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south *side* of the altar. 2 Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side. 3 And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters *were* to the ancles. 4 Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters *were* to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters *were* to the loins. 5 Afterward he measured a thousand; and *it was* a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. 6 And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen *this*? then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river *were* very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: *which being* brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. 9 And it shall come to pass, *that* every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. 10 And it shall come to pass, *that* the fishers shall stand upon it from En-ge-di, even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a *place* to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. 11 But the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt. 12 And by the river upon the bank there-



of, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

This part of Ezekiel's vision must so necessarily have a mystical and spiritual meaning that thence we conclude the other parts of his vision have a mystical and spiritual meaning also; for it cannot be applied to the waters brought by pipes into the temple for the washing of the sacrifices, the keeping of the temple clean, and the carrying off of those waters, for that would be to turn this pleasant river into a sink or common sewer. That prophecy, Zech. xiv. 8, may explain it, of *living waters* that shall go out from Jerusalem, *half of them towards the former sea and half of them towards the hinder sea*. And there is plainly a reference to this in St. John's vision of a *pure river of water of life*, Rev. xxii. 1. That seems to represent the glory and joy which are grace perfected. This seems to represent the grace and joy which are glory begun. Most interpreters agree that these waters signify the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, and spread itself into the countries about, and the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost which accompanied it, and by virtue of which it spread far and produced strange and blessed effects. Ezekiel had walked round the house again and again, and yet did not till now take notice of those waters; for God makes known his mind and will to his people, not all at once, but by degrees. Now observe,

I. The rise of these waters. He is not put to trace the streams to the fountain, but has the fountain-head first discovered to him (v. 1): *Waters issued out from the threshold of the house eastward, and from under the right side of the house*, that is, the south side of the altar. And again (v. 2), *There ran out waters on the right side*, signifying that from Zion should go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, Isa. ii. 3. There it was that the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, and endued them with the gift of tongues, that they might carry these waters to all nations. In the temple first they were to stand and *preach the words of this life*, Acts v. 20. They must preach the gospel to all nations, but must *begin at Jerusalem*, Luke xxiv. 47. But that is not all: Christ is the temple; he is the door; from him those living waters flow, out of his pierced side. It is the water that he gives us that is the *well of water which springs up*, John iv. 14. And it is by believing in him that we receive from him *rivers of living*

*water*; and *this spoke he of the Spirit*, John vii. 38, 39. The original of these waters was not above-ground, but they sprang up from under the threshold; for the fountain of a believer's life is a mystery; it is *hid with Christ in God*, Col. iii. 3. Some observe that they came forth *on the right side of the house* to intimate that gospel-blessings are right-hand blessings. It is also an encouragement to those who attend at Wisdom's gates, at the posts of her doors, who are willing to lie at the threshold of God's house, as David was, that they lie at the fountain-head of comfort and grace; the very entrance into God's word gives light and life, Ps. cxix. 130. David speaks it to the praise of Zion, *All my springs are in thee*, Ps. lxxxvii. 7. They came from the *side of the altar*, for it is in and by Jesus Christ, the great altar (who *sanctifies our gifts* to God), that God has *blessed us with spiritual blessings in holy heavenly places*. From God as the fountain, in him as the channel, flows the river which *makes glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High*, Ps. xlvii. 4. But observe how much the blessedness and joy of glorified saints in heaven exceed those of the best and happiest saints on earth; here the streams of our comfort arise from *under the threshold*; there they proceed from *the throne, the throne of God and of the Lamb*, Rev. xxii. 1.

II. The progress and increase of these waters: They *went forth eastward* (v. 3), *towards the east country* (v. 8), for so they were directed. The prophet and his guide followed the stream as it ran down from the holy mountains, and when they had followed it about a *thousand cubits* they went over across it, to try the depth of it, and it was *to the ancles*, v. 3. Then they walked along on the bank of the river on the other side, a thousand cubits more, and then, to try the depth of it, they waded through it the second time, and it was up to *their knees*, v. 4. They walked along by it a thousand cubits more, and then forded it the third time, and then it was up to their middle—the *waters were to the loins*. They then walked a thousand cubits further, and attempted to repass it the fourth time, but found it impracticable: *The waters had risen*, by the addition either of brooks that fell into it above ground or by springs under ground, so that they were *waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over*, v. 5. Note, 1. The waters of the sanctuary are running waters, as those of a river, not standing waters, as those of a pond. The gospel, when it was first preached, was still spreading further. Grace in the soul is still pressing forward; it is an active principle, *plus ultra—onward still*, till it comes to perfection. 2. They are increasing waters. This river, as it runs constantly, so the further it goes the fuller it grows. The gospel-church was very small in its beginnings, like a little purling brook;

but by degrees it came to be *to the ancles, to the knees*: many were added to it daily, and the *grain of mustard seed* grew up to be a *great tree*. The gifts of the Spirit increase by being exercised, and grace, where it is true, is growing, like the light of the morning, which *shines more and more to the perfect day*. 3. It is good for us to follow these waters, and go along with them. Observe the progress of the gospel in the world; observe the process of the work of grace in the heart; attend the motions of the blessed Spirit, and walk after them, under a divine guidance, as Ezekiel here did. 4. It is good to be often searching into the things of God, and trying the depth of them, not only to look on the surface of those waters, but to go to the bottom of them as far as we can, to be often digging, often diving, into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, as those who covet to be intimately acquainted with those things. 5. If we search into the things of God, we shall find some things very plain and easy to be understood, as the waters that were but to the ancles, others more difficult, and which require a deeper search, as the water to the knees or the loins, and some quite beyond our reach, which we cannot penetrate into, or account for, but, despairing to find the bottom, must, as St. Paul, sit down at the brink, and adore the *depth*, Rom. xi. 33. It has been often said that in the scripture, like these waters of the sanctuary, there are some places so shallow that a lamb may wade through them, and others so deep that an elephant may swim in them. And it is our wisdom, as the prophet here, to begin with that which is most easy, and get our hearts washed with those things before we proceed to that which is *dark and hard to be understood*; it is good to take our work before us.

III. The extent of this river: *It issues towards the east country*, but thence it either divides itself into several streams or fetches a compass, so that it *goes down into the desert*, and so *goes into the sea*, either into the *dead sea*, which lay *south-east*, or the sea of Tiberias, which lay *north-east*, or the great sea, which lay *west*, v. 8. This was accomplished when the gospel was preached with success throughout all the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts viii. 1), and afterwards the nations about, nay, and those that lay most remote, even in the isles of the sea, were enlightened and leavened by it. The sound of it went forth *to the end of the world*; and the enemies of it could no more prevail to stop the progress of it than that of a mighty river.

IV. The healing virtue of this river. The waters of the sanctuary, wherever they come and have a free course, will be found a wonderful restorative. Being *brought forth into the sea*, the sulphureous lake of Sodom, that standing monument of divine vengeance, even those *waters shall be healed* (v. 8), shall

become sweet, and pleasant, and healthful. This intimates the wonderful and blessed change that the gospel would make, where-soever it came in its power, as great a change, in respect both of character and condition, as the turning of the dead sea into a fountain of gardens. When children of wrath became children of love, and those that were dead in trespasses and sins were made alive, then this was fulfilled. The gospel was as that salt which Elisba cast into the spring of the waters of Jericho, with which he *healed them*, 2 Kings ii. 20, 21. Christ, coming into the world to be its physician, sent his gospel as the great medicine, the *panpharmakon*; there is in it a remedy for every malady. Nay, wherever these rivers come, they *make things to live* (v. 9), both plants and animals; they are the *water of life*, Rev. xxii. 1, 17. Christ came, *that we might have life*, and for that end he sends his gospel. *Every thing shall live whither the river comes*. The grace of God makes dead sinners alive and living saints lively; every thing is made fruitful and flourishing by it. But its effect is according as it is received, and as the mind is prepared and disposed to receive it; for (v. 11) with respect to the marshes and *miry places thereof*, that are settled in the mire of their own sinfulness, and will not be healed, or settled in the moisture of their own righteousness, and think they need no healing, their doom is, *They shall not be healed*; the same gospel which to others is a savour of life unto life shall to them be a savour of death unto death: *they shall be given to salt*, to perpetual barrenness, Deut. xxix. 23. Those that will not be watered with the grace of God, and made fruitful, shall be abandoned to their own hearts' lusts, and left for ever unfruitful. *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still. Neer fruit grow on thee more for ever*. They shall be given to salt, that is, to be monuments of divine justice, as Lot's wife that was turned into a *pillar of salt*, to season others.

V. The great plenty of fish that should be in this river. Every living moving thing shall be found here, shall *live here* (v. 9), shall come on and prosper, shall be the best of the kind, and shall increase greatly; so that there shall be a *very great multitude of fish, according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceedingly many*. There shall be as great plenty of the river fish, and as vast shoals of them, as there is of salt-water fish, v. 10. There shall be great numbers of Christians in the church, and those multiplying like fishes in the rising generations and the *dew of their youth*. In the creation the *waters brought forth the fish abundantly* (Gen. i. 20, 21), and they still live in and by the waters that produced them; so believers are *begotten by the word of truth* (James i. 18), and *born by it* (1 Pet. i. 23), that river of God; by it they live, from it they have their maintenance and subsistence; in the



waters of the sanctuary they are as in their element, out of them they are as fish upon dry ground; so David was when he thirsted and panted for God, for the living God. Where the fish are known to be in abundance, thither will the fishers flock, and there they will cast their nets; and therefore, to intimate the replenishing of these waters and their being made every way useful, it is here foretold that the fishers shall stand upon the banks of this river, from *En-gedi*, which lies on the border of the dead sea, to *En-eghlaim*, another city, which joins to that sea, and all along shall spread their nets. The dead sea, which before was shunned as noisome and noxious, shall be frequented. Gospel-grace makes those persons and places which were unprofitable and good for nothing to become serviceable to God and man.

VI. The trees that were on the banks of this river—*many trees on the one side and on the other* (v. 7), which made the prospect very pleasant and agreeable to the eye; the shelter of these trees also would be a convenience to the fishery. But that is not all (v. 12); they are trees for meat, and the fruit of them shall not be consumed, for it shall produce fresh fruit every month. The leaf shall be for medicine, and it shall not fade. This part of the vision is copied out into St. John's vision very exactly (Rev. xxii. 2), where, on either side of the river, is said to grow the tree of life, which yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves were for the healing of the nations. Christians are supposed to be these trees, ministers especially, trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord (Isa. lxi. 3), set by the rivers of water, the waters of the sanctuary (Ps. i. 3), grafted into Christ the tree of life, and by virtue of their union with him made trees of life too, rooted in him, Col. ii. 7. There is a great variety of these trees, through the diversity of gifts with which they are endued by that one Spirit who works all in all. They grow on the bank of the river, for they keep close to holy ordinances, and through them derive from Christ sap and virtue. They are fruit-trees, designed, as the fig-tree and the olive, with their fruits to honour God and man, Judg. ix. 9. The fruit thereof shall be for meat, for the lips of the righteous feed many. The fruits of their righteousness are one way or other beneficial. The very leaves of these trees are for medicine, for bruises and sores, margin. Good Christians with their good discourses, which are as their leaves, as well as with their charitable actions, which are as their fruits, do good to those about them; they strengthen the weak, and bind up the broken-hearted. Their cheerfulness does good like a medicine, not only to themselves, but to others also. They shall be enabled by the grace of God to persevere in their goodness and usefulness; their leaf shall not fade, or lose its medicinal virtue, having not only life in their root, but

sap in all their branches; their profession shall not wither (Ps. i. 3), neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed; that is, they shall not lose the principle of their fruitfulness, but shall still bring forth fruit in old age, to show that the Lord is upright (Ps. xcii. 14, 15), or the reward of their fruitfulness shall abide for ever; they bring forth fruit that shall abound to their account in the great day, fruit to life eternal; that is indeed fruit which shall not be consumed. They bring new fruit according to their months, some in one month and others in another: so that still there shall be one or other found to serve the glory of God for the purpose he designs. Or each one of them shall bring forth fruit monthly, which denotes an abundant disposition to fruit-bearing (they shall never be weary of well-doing), and a very happy climate, such that there shall be a perpetual spring and summer. And the reason of this extraordinary fruitfulness is because their waters issued out of the sanctuary; it is not to be ascribed to any thing in themselves, but to the continual supplies of divine grace, with which they are watered every moment (Isa. xxvii. 3); for, whoever planted them, it was that which gave the increase.

13 Thus saith the Lord God; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. 14 And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another: concerning the which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers: and this land shall fall unto you for inheritance. 15 And this shall be the border of the land toward the north side, from the great sea, the way of Hethlon, as men go to Zedad; 16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibram, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazar-hatticon, which is by the coast of Hauran. 17 And the border from the sea shall be Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus, and the north northward, and the border of Hamath. And this is the north side. 18 And the east side ye shall measure from Hauran, and from Damascus, and from Gilead, and from the land of Israel by Jordan, from the border unto the east sea. And this is the east side. 19 And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the waters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea. And this is the south side southward. 20 The west side also shall be the great sea from the



border, till a man come over against Hamath. This is the west side. 21 So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. 22 And it shall come to pass, *that* ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. 23 And it shall come to pass, *that* in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give *him* his inheritance, saith the Lord God.

We are now to pass from the affairs of the sanctuary to those of the state, from the city to the country. 1. The land of Canaan is here secured to them for an inheritance (v. 14): *I lifted up my hand to give it unto your fathers*, that is, promised it upon oath to them and their posterity. Though the possession had been a great while discontinued, yet God had not forgotten his oath which he swore to their fathers. Though God's providences may for a time seem to contradict his promises, yet the promise will certainly take place at last, for God will be *ever mindful of his covenant*. *I lifted up my hand to give it*, and therefore it shall without fail *fall to you for an inheritance*. Thus the heavenly Canaan is sure to all the seed, because it is what *God, who cannot lie, has promised*. 2. It is here circumscribed, and the bounds and limits of it are fixed, which they must not pass over to encroach upon their neighbours and which their neighbours shall not break through to encroach upon them. We had such a draught of the borders of Canaan when Joshua was to put the people in possession of it, Num. xxxiv. 1, &c. That begins with the salt sea in the south, goes round and ends there. This begins with Hamath about Damascus in the north, and so goes round and ends there, v. 20. Note, It is God that *appoints the bounds of our habitation*; and his Israel shall always have cause to say that *the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places*. The lake of Sodom is here called *the east sea*, for, it being healed by the waters of the sanctuary, it is no more to be called a *salt sea*, as it was in Numbers. 3. It is here ordered to be divided among the tribes of Israel, reckoning Joseph for two tribes, to make up the number of twelve, when Levi was taken out to attend the sanctuary, and had his lot adjoining to that (v. 13, 21): *You shall inherit it, one as well as another*, v. 14. The tribes shall have an equal share, one as much as another. As the tribes returned out of Babylon, this

seems unequal, because some tribes were much more numerous than the other, and indeed the most were of Judah and Benjamin and very few of the other ten tribes; but as the twelve tribes stand, in type and vision, for the gospel-church, the Israel of God, it was very equal, because we find in another vision an equal number of each of the twelve tribes *sealed for the living God*, just 12,000 of each, Rev. vii. 5, &c. And to those sealed ones these allotments did belong. It intimates likewise that all the subjects of Christ's kingdom have *obtained like precious faith*. Male and female, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, are all alike welcome to Christ and made partakers of him. 4. The strangers who sojourn among them, *who shall beget children* and be built up into families, and so help to people their country, *shall have inheritance among the tribes*, as if they had been native Israelites (v. 22, 23), which was by no means allowed in Joshua's division of the land. This is an act for a general naturalization, which would teach the Jews who was their neighbour, not those only of their own nation and religion, but those, whoever they were, that they had an opportunity of showing kindness to, because from them they would be willing to receive kindness. It would likewise invite strangers to come and settle among them, and put themselves under the wings of the divine Majesty. But it certainly looks at gospel-times, when the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile was taken down, and both were put upon a level before God, both made one in Christ, in whom *there is no difference*, Rom. x. 12. This land was a type of the heavenly Canaan, that *better country* (Heb. xi. 16), in which believing Gentiles shall have a blessed lot, as well as believing Jews, Isa. lvi. 3.

## CHAP. XLVIII.

In this chapter we have particular directions given for the distribution of the land, of which we had the metes and bounds assigned in the foregoing chapter. I. The portions of the twelve tribes, seven to the north of the sanctuary (ver. 1-7) and five to the south, ver. 23-29. II. The allotment of land for the sanctuary, and the priests (ver. 8-11), for the Levites (ver. 12-14), for the city (ver. 15-20), and for the prince, ver. 21, 22. Much of this we had before, ch. xlv. III. A plan of the city, its gates, and the new name given to it (ver. 30-35), which seals up, and concludes, the vision and prophecy of this book.

**N**OW these *are* the names of the tribes. From the north end to the coast of the way of Hethlon, as one goeth to Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward, to the coast of Hamath; for these are his sides east and west; a *portion for* Dan. 2 And by the border of Dan, from the east side unto the west side, a *portion for* Asher. 3 And by the border of Asher, from the east side even unto the west side, a *portion for* Naphtali. 4 And by the border of Naphtali, from the east side unto the



west side, a *portion* for Manasseh. 5 And by the border of Manasseh, from the east side unto the west side, a *portion* for Ephraim. 6 And by the border of Ephraim, from the east side even unto the west side, a *portion* for Reuben. 7 And by the border of Reuben, from the east side even unto the west side, a *portion* for Judah. 8 And by the border of Judah, from the east side unto the west side, shall be the offering which ye shall offer of five and twenty thousand *reeds* in breadth, and in length as one of the other parts, from the east side unto the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it. 9 The oblation that ye shall offer unto the LORD *shall be* of five and twenty thousand in length, and of ten thousand in breadth. 10 And for them, *even* for the priests, shall be *this* holy oblation; toward the north five and twenty thousand *in length*, and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south five and twenty thousand in length: and the sanctuary of the LORD shall be in the midst thereof. 11 *It shall be* for the priests that are sanctified of the sons of Zadok; which have kept my charge, which went not astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. 12 And *this* oblation of the land that is offered shall be unto them a thing most holy by the border of the Levites. 13 And over against the border of the priests the Levites *shall have* five and twenty thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth: all the length *shall be* five and twenty thousand, and the breadth ten thousand. 14 And they shall not sell of it, neither exchange, nor alienate the first-fruits of the land: for *it is* holy unto the LORD. 15 And the five thousand, that are left in the breadth over against the five and twenty thousand, shall be a profane *place* for the city, for dwelling, and for suburbs: and the city shall be in the midst thereof. 16 And these *shall be* the measures thereof; the north side four thousand and five hundred, and the south side four thou-

sand and five hundred, and on the east side four thousand and five hundred, and the west side four thousand and five hundred. 17 And the suburbs of the city shall be toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty. 18 And the residue in length over against the oblation of the holy *portion shall be* ten thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward: and it shall be over against the oblation of the holy *portion*; and the increase thereof shall be for food unto them that serve the city. 19 And they that serve the city shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel. 20 All the oblation *shall be* five and twenty thousand by five and twenty thousand: ye shall offer the holy oblation four-square, with the possession of the city. 21 And the residue *shall be* for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy oblation, and of the possession of the city, over against the five and twenty thousand of the oblation toward the east border, and westward over against the five and twenty thousand toward the west border, over against the portions for the prince: and it shall be the holy oblation; and the sanctuary of the house *shall be* in the midst thereof. 22 Moreover from the possession of the Levites, and from the possession of the city, *being* in the midst of that which is the prince's, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, shall be for the prince. 23 As for the rest of the tribes, from the east side unto the west side, Benjamin *shall have* a *portion*. 24 And by the border of Benjamin, from the east side unto the west side, Simeon *shall have* a *portion*. 25 And by the border of Simeon, from the east side unto the west side, Issachar a *portion*. 26 And by the border of Issachar, from the east side unto the west side, Zebulun a *portion*. 27 And by the border of Zebulun, from the east side unto the west side, Gad a *portion*. 28 And by the border of Gad, at the south side south-

ward, the border shall be even from Tamar unto the waters of strife in Kadesh, and to the river toward the great sea. 29 This is the land which ye shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their portions, saith the Lord God. 30 And these are the goings out of the city on the north side, four thousand and five hundred measures.

We have here a very short and ready way taken for the dividing of the land among the twelve tribes, not so tedious and so far about as the way that was taken in Joshua's time; for in the distribution of spiritual and heavenly blessings there is not that danger of murmuring and quarrelling that there is in the participation of temporal blessings. When God gave to the labourers every one his penny those that were uneasy at it were soon put to silence with, *May I not do what I will with my own?* And such is the equal distribution here among the tribes. In this distribution of the land we may observe, 1. That it differs very much from the division of it in Joshua's time, and agrees not with the order of their birth, nor with that of their blessing by Jacob or Moses. Simeon here is not divided in Jacob, nor is Zebulun a haven of ships, a plain intimation that it is not so much to be understood literally as spiritually, though the mystery of it is very much hidden from us. In gospel times old things have passed away; *behold, all things have become new.* The Israel of God is cast into a new method. 2. That the tribe of Dan, which was last provided for in the first division of Canaan (Josh. xix. 40), is first provided for here, v. 1. Thus in the gospel the last shall be first, Matt. xix. 30. God, in the dispensation of his grace, does not follow the same method that he does in the disposals of his providence. But Dan had now his portion thereabouts where he had only one city before, northward, on the border of Damascus, and furthest of all from the sanctuary, because that tribe had revolted to idolatry. 3. That all the ten tribes that were carried away by the king of Assyria, as well as the two tribes that were long afterwards carried to Babylon, have their allotment in this visionary land, which some think had its accomplishment in the particular persons and families of those tribes who returned with Judah and Benjamin, of which we find many instances in Ezra and Nehemiah; and it is probable that there were returns of many more afterwards at several times, which are not recorded; and the Jews having Galilee, and other parts, that had been the possessions of the ten tribes, put into their hands, in common with them, they enjoyed them. Grotius says, If the ten tribes had repented and returned to

God, as the chief fathers of Judah and Benjamin did, and the priests and Levites (Ezra i. 5), they would have fared as those two tribes did, but they forfeited the benefit of this glorious prophecy by sin. However, we believe it has its designed accomplishment in the establishment and enlargement of the gospel church, and the happy settlement of all those who are Israelites indeed in the sure and sweet enjoyment of the privileges of the new covenant, in which there is enough for all and enough for each. 4. That every tribe in this visionary distribution had its particular lot assigned it by a divine appointment; for it was never the intention of the gospel to pluck up the hedge of property and lay all in common; it was in a way of charity, not of legal right, that the first Christians had all things common (Acts ii. 44), and many precepts of the gospel suppose that every man should know his own. We must not only acknowledge, but acquiesce in, the hand of God appointing us our lot, and be well pleased with it, believing it fittest for us. *He shall choose our inheritance for us,* Ps. xlvii. 4. 5. That the tribes lay contiguous. By the border of one tribe was the portion of another, all in a row, in exact order, so that, like stones in an arch, they fixed, and strengthened, and wedged in one another. *Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren thus to dwell together!* It was a figure of the communion of churches and saints under the gospel-government; thus, though they are many, yet they are one, and should hold together in holy love and mutual assistance. 6. That the lot of Reuben, which before lay at a distance beyond Jordan, now lies next to Judah, and next but one to the sanctuary; for the scandal he lay under, for which he was told *he should not excel*, began by this time to wear off. What has turned to the reproach of any person or people ought not to be remembered for ever, but should at length be kindly forgotten. 7. That the sanctuary was in the midst of them. There were seven tribes to the north of it, and the Levites, the prince's, and the city's portion, with that of five tribes more, to the south of it; so that it was, as it ought to be, in the heart of the kingdom, that it might diffuse its benign influences to the whole, and might be the centre of their unity. The tribes that lay most remote from each other would meet there in a mutual acquaintance and fellowship. Those of the same parish or congregation, though dispersed, and having no occasion otherwise to know each other, yet by meeting stately to worship God together should have their hearts knit to each other in holy love. 8. That where the sanctuary was the priests were: *For them, even for the priests, shall this holy oblation be,* v. 10. As, on the one hand, this denotes honour and comfort to ministers, that what is given for their support and maintenance is reckoned a holy oblation to



the Lord, so it intimates their duty, which is that, since they are appointed and maintained for the service of the sanctuary, they ought to attend continually to this very thing, to reside on their cures. Those that live upon the altar must serve at the altar, not take the wages to themselves and devolve the work upon others; but how can they serve the altar, his altar they live upon, if they do not live near it? 9. Those priests had the priests' share of these lands that had approved themselves faithful to God in times of trial (v. 11): *It shall be for the sons of Zadok*, who, it seems, had signalized themselves in some critical juncture, and went not astray when the children of Israel, and the other Levites, went astray. God will put honour upon those who keep their integrity in times of general apostasy, and he has special favours in reserve for them. Those are swimming upwards, and so they will find at last, that are swimming against the stream. 10. The land which was appropriated to the ministers of the sanctuary might by no means be alienated. It was in the nature of the *first-fruits of the land*, and was therefore *holy to the Lord*; and, though the priests and Levites had both the use of it and the inheritance of it to them and their heirs, yet they might not *sell it nor exchange it*, v. 14. It is sacrilege to convert that to other uses which is dedicated to God. 11. The land allotted for the city and its suburbs is called a *profane place* (v. 15), or *common*; not but that the city was a holy city above other cities, for the Lord was there, but, in comparison with the sanctuary, it was a profane place. Yet it is too often true in the worst sense that great cities, even those which, like this, have the sanctuary near them, are profane places, and it ought to be deeply lamented. It was the complaint of old, *From Jerusalem has profaneness gone forth into all the land*, Jer. xxiii. 15. 12. The city is made to be exactly square, and the suburbs extending themselves equally on all sides, as the Levites' cities did in the first division of the land (v. 16, 17), which, never being literally fulfilled in any city, intimates that it is to be understood spiritually of the beauty and stability of the gospel church, that *city of the living God*, which is formed according to the wisdom and counsel of God, and is made firm and immovable by his promise. 13. Whereas, before, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were principally of Judah and Benjamin, in whose tribe it lay, now the head city lies not in the particular lot of any of the tribes, but *those that serve the city*, and bear office in it, *shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel*, v. 19. The most eminent men must be picked out of all the tribes of Israel for the service of the city, because many eyes were upon it, and there was great resort to it from all parts of the nation and from other nations. Those that live in the city are said to serve the city,

for, wherever we are, we must study to be serviceable to the place, some way or other, according as our capacity is. They must not come out of the tribes of Israel to the city to take their ease, and enjoy their pleasures, but to serve the city, to do all the good they can there, and in so doing they would have a good influence upon the country too. 14. Care was taken that those who applied themselves to public business in the city, as well as in the sanctuary, should have an honourable comfortable maintenance; lands are appointed, *the increase whereof shall be food unto those that serve the city*, v. 18. Who goes a warfare at his own charges? Magistrates, that attend the service of the state, as well as ministers, that attend the service of the church, should have all due encouragement and support in so doing; and *for this cause pay we tribute also*. 15. The prince had a lot for himself, suited to the dignity of his high station (v. 21); we took an account of it before, *ch. xlv*. He was seated near the sanctuary, where the testimony of Israel was, and near the city, where the *thrones of judgment* were, that he might be a protection to both and might see that the duty of both was carefully and faithfully done; and herein he was a minister of God for good to the whole community. Christ is the church's prince, that defends it on every side, and creates a defence; nay, he is himself a defence upon all its glory and encompasses it with his favour. 16. As Judah had his lot next the sanctuary on one side, so Benjamin had, of all the tribes, his lot nearest to it on the other side, which honour was reserved for those who adhered to the house of David and the temple at Jerusalem when the other ten tribes went astray from both. It is enough if treachery and apostasy, upon repentance, be pardoned, but constancy and fidelity shall be rewarded and preferred.

31 And the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel: three gates northward; one gate of Reuben, one gate of Judah, one gate of Levi. 32 And at the east side four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of Joseph, one gate of Benjamin, one gate of Dan. 33 And at the south side four thousand and five hundred measures: and three gates; one gate of Simeon, one gate of Issachar, one gate of Zebulun. 34 At the west side four thousand and five hundred, with their three gates; one gate of Gad, one gate of Asher, one gate of Naphtali. 35 It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city



from *that day shall be*, *The Lord is there*.

We have here a further account of the city that should be built for the metropolis of this glorious land, and to be the receptacle of those who should come from all parts to worship in the sanctuary adjoining. It is nowhere called Jerusalem, nor is the land which we have had such a particular account of the dividing of any where called the land of Canaan; for the old names are forgotten, to intimate that *the old things are done away, behold all things have become new*. Now, concerning this city, observe here, 1. The measures of its out-lets, and the grounds belonging to it, for its several conveniences; each way its appurtenances extended 4500 measures, 18,000 in all, *v. 35*. But what these measures were is uncertain. It is never said, in all this chapter, whether so many *reeds* (as our translation determines by inserting that word, *v. 8*, each reed containing six cubits and a span, *ch. xl. 5*, and why should the measurer appear with the measuring reed in his hand of that length if he did not measure with *that*, except where it is expressly said he measured by cubits?) or whether, as others think, it is so many cubits, because those are mentioned *ch. xlv. 2* and *ch. xlvii. 3*. Yet that makes me incline rather to think that where cubits are not mentioned it must be intended so many lengths of the measuring reed. But those who understand it of so many cubits are not agreed whether it be meant of the common cubit, which was half a yard, or the geometrical cubit, which, for better expedition, is supposed to be mostly used in surveying lands, which, some say, contained six cubits, others about three cubits and a half, so making 1000 cubits the same with 1000 paces, that is, an English mile. But our being left at this uncertainty is an intimation that these things are to be understood spiritually, and that what is principally meant is that there is an exact and just proportion observed by Infinite Wisdom in modelling the gospel church, which though now we cannot discern we shall when we come to heaven. 2. The number of its gates. It had twelve gates in all, three on each side, which was very agreeable when it lay four square; and these twelve gates were inscribed to the twelve tribes. Because the city was to be served out of all the tribes of Israel (*v. 19*) it was fit that each tribe should have its gate; and, Levi being here taken in, to keep to the number twelve Ephraim and Manasseh are made one in Joseph, *v. 32*. On the north side were the gates of Reuben, Judah, and Levi (*v. 31*), on the east the gates of Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan (*v. 32*), on the south the gates of Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun (*v. 33*), and on the west the gates of Gad, Asher, and Naphtali, *v. 34*. Conformable to this, in St. John's vision, the

new Jerusalem (for so the holy city is called there, though not here) has *twelve gates*, three on a side, and on them are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, *Rev. xxi. 12, 13*. Note, Into the church of Christ, both militant and triumphant, there is a free access by faith for all that come of every tribe, from every quarter. Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven for all believers. Whoever will may come and take of the water of life, of the tree of life, freely. 3. The name given to this city: From that day, when it shall be newly-erected according to this model, the name of it shall be, not, as before, *Jerusalem*—*The vision of peace*, but, which is the original of that, and more than equivalent to it, *Jehovah Shammah*—*The Lord is there*, *v. 35*. This intimated, (1) That the captives, after their return, should have manifest tokens of God's presence with them and his residence among them, both in his ordinances and in his providences. They shall have no occasion to ask, as their fathers did, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not?* for they shall see and say that he is with them of a truth. And then, though their troubles were many and threatening, they were like the bush which burned but was not consumed, because *the Lord was there*. But when God departed from their temple, when he said, *Migremus hinc*—*Let us go hence*, their house was soon left unto them desolate. Being no longer his, it was not much longer theirs. (2.) That the gospel-church should likewise have the presence of God in it, though not in the *Shechinah*, as of old, yet in a token of it no less sure, that of his Spirit. Where the gospel is faithfully preached, gospel ordinances are duly administered, and God is worshipped in the name of Jesus Christ only, it may truly be said, *The Lord is there*; for faithful is he that has said, and he will be as good as his word, *Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world*. *The Lord is there* in his church, to rule and govern it, to protect and defend it, and graciously to accept and own his sincere worshippers, and to be nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for. This should engage us to keep close to the communion of saints, for *the Lord is there*; and then whither shall we go to better ourselves? Nay, it is true of every good Christian; he dwells in God, and God in him; whatever soul has in it a living principle of grace, it may be truly said, *The Lord is there*. (3.) That the glory and happiness of heaven should consist chiefly in this, that *the Lord is there*. St. John's representation of that blessed state does indeed far exceed this in many respects. That is all gold, and pearls, and precious stones; it is much larger than this, and much brighter, for it needs not the light of the sun. But, in making the presence of God the principal matter of its bliss, they both agree. There the happiness of the glorified saints is



made to be that *God himself shall be with them* (Rev. xxi. 3), that *he who sits on the throne shall dwell among them*, Rev. vii. 15. And here it is made to crown the bliss of this holy city that *the Lord is there*. Let us therefore give all diligence to make sure to ourselves a place in that city, that we may be for ever with the Lord.

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AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET  
DANIEL.

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THE book of Ezekiel left the affairs of Jerusalem under a doleful aspect, all in ruins, but with a joyful prospect of all in glory again. This of Daniel fitly follows. Ezekiel told us what was seen, and what was foreseen, by him in the former years of the captivity: Daniel tells us what was seen, and foreseen, in the latter years of the captivity. When God employs different hands, yet it is about the same work. And it was a comfort to the poor captives that they had first one prophet among them and then another, to show them *how long*, and a sign that God had not quite cast them off. Let us enquire, I. Concerning this prophet. His Hebrew name was *Daniel*, which signifies the *judgment of God*; his Chaldean name was *Belteshazzar*. He was of the tribe of Judah, and, as it should seem, of the royal family. He was betimes eminent for wisdom and piety. Ezekiel, his contemporary, but much his senior, speaks of him as an oracle when thus he upbraids the king of Tyre with his conceitedness of himself: *Thou art wiser than Daniel*, Ezek. xxviii. 3. He is likewise there celebrated for success in prayer, when Noah, Daniel, and Job are reckoned as three men that had the greatest interest in heaven of any, Ezek. xiv. 14. He began betimes to be famous, and continued long so. Some of the Jewish rabbins are loth to acknowledge him to be a prophet of the higher form, and therefore rank his book among the *Hagiographa*, not among the prophecies, and would not have their disciples pay much regard to it. One reason they pretend is because he did not live such a mean mortified life as Jeremiah and some other of the prophets did, but lived like a prince, and was a prime-minister of state; whereas we find him persecuted as other prophets were (*ch. vi.*), and mortifying himself as other prophets did, when he *ate no pleasant bread* (*ch. x. 3.*), and fainting and sick when he was under the power of the Spirit of prophecy, *ch. viii. 27.* Another reason they pretend is because he wrote his book in a heathen country, and *there* had his visions, and not in the land of Israel; but, for the same reason, Ezekiel also must be expunged out of the roll of prophets. But the true reason is that he speaks so plainly of the time of the Messiah's coming that the Jews cannot avoid the conviction of it and therefore do not care to hear of it. But Josephus calls him one of the *greatest of the prophets*, nay, the angel Gabriel calls him a *man greatly beloved*. He lived long an active life in the courts and councils of some of the greatest monarchs the world ever had, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius; for we mistake if we confine the privilege of an intercourse with heaven to speculative men, or those that spend their time in contemplation; no, who was more intimately acquainted with the mind of God than Daniel, a courtier, a statesman, and a man of business? The Spirit, as the wind, blows where it lists. And, if those that have much to do in the world plead that as an excuse for the infrequency and slowness of their converse with God, Daniel will condemn them. Some have thought that he returned to Jerusalem, and was one of the masters of the Greek synagogue; but nothing of that appears in scripture; it is therefore generally concluded that he died in Persia at Susan, where he lived to be very old. II. Concerning this book. The first six chapters of it are historical, and are plain and easy; the last six are prophetic, and in them are many things dark, and hard to be understood, which yet would be more intelligible if we had a more complete history of the nations, and especially the Jewish nation, from Daniel's time to the coming of the Messiah. Our Saviour intimates the difficulty of apprehending the sense of Daniel's prophecies when, speaking of them, he says, *Let him that readeth understand*, Matt. xxiv. 15. The first chapter, and the first three verses of the second chapter, are in Hebrew; thence to the eighth chapter is in the Chaldee dialect; and thence to the end is in Hebrew. Mr. Broughton observes that, as the Chaldeans were kind to Daniel, and gave cups of cold water to him when he requested it, rather than the king's wine, God would not have them lose their reward, but made that language which they taught him to have honour in his writings through all the world, unto this day. Daniel, according to his computation, continues the holy story from the first surprising of Jeru-

salem by the Chaldean Babel, when he himself was carried away captive, until the last destruction of it by Rome, the mystical Babel, for so far forward his predictions look, *ch. ix. 27*. The fables of Susannah, and of Bel and the Dragon, in both which Daniel is made a party, are apocryphal stories, which we think we have no reason to give any credit to, they being never found in the Hebrew or Chaldee, but only in the Greek, nor ever admitted by the Jewish church. There are some both of the histories and of the prophecies of this book that bear date in the latter end of the Chaldean monarchy, and others of both that are dated in the beginning of the Persian monarchy. But both Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which Daniel interpreted, and his own visions, point at the Grecian and Roman monarchies, and very particularly at the Jews' troubles under Antiochus, which it would be of great use to them to prepare for; as his fixing the very time for the coming of the Messiah was of use to all those that waited for the consolation of Israel, and is to us, for the confirming of our belief, That this is he who should come, and we are to look for no other.

## CHAP. I.

This chapter gives us a more particular account of the beginning of Daniel's life, his original and education, than we have of any other of the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, began immediately with divine visions; but Daniel began with the study of human learning, and was afterwards honoured with divine visions; such variety of methods has God taken in training up men for the service of his church. We have here, I. Jehoiakim's first captivity (*ver. 1, 2*), in which Daniel, with others of the seed-royal, was carried to Babylon. II. The choice made of Daniel, and some other young men, to be brought up in the Chaldean literature, that they might be fitted to serve the government, and the provision made for them, *ver. 3-7*. III. Their pious refusal to eat the portion of the king's meat, and their determining to live upon pulse and water, which, having tried it, the master of the eunuchs allowed them to do, finding that it agreed very well with them, *ver. 8-16*. IV. Their wonderful improvement, above all their fellows, in wisdom and knowledge, *ver. 17-21*.

**I**N the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 And the LORD gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure-house of his god. 3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring *certain* of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom *was* no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as *had* ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel

the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

We have in these verses an account,

I. Of the first descent which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, made upon Judah and Jerusalem, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, and his success in that expedition (*v. 1, 2*): *He besieged Jerusalem*, soon made himself master of it, seized the king, took whom he pleased and what he pleased away with him, and then left Jehoiakim to reign as tributary to him, which he did about eight years longer, but then rebelled, and it was his ruin. Now from this *first* captivity most interpreters think the seventy years are to be dated, though Jerusalem was not destroyed, nor the captivity completed, till about nineteen years after. In that first year Daniel was carried to Babylon, and there continued the whole seventy years (*see v. 21*), during which time all nations shall serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his son's son, *Jer. xxv. 11*. This one prophet therefore saw within the compass of his own time the rise, reign, and ruin of that monarchy; so that it was *res unius ætatis*—the affair of a single age, such short-lived things are the kingdoms of the earth; but the kingdom of heaven is everlasting. The righteous, that see them taking root, shall see *their fall*, *Job v. 3*; *Prov. xxix. 16*. Mr. Broughton observes the proportion of times in God's government since the coming out of Egypt: thence to their entering Canaan forty years, thence seven years to the dividing of the land, thence seven Jubilees to the first year of Samuel, in whom prophecy began, thence to this first year of the captivity seven seventies of years, 490 (ten Jubilees), thence to the return one seventy, thence to the death of Christ seven seventies more, and thence to the destruction of Jerusalem forty years.

II. The improvement he made of this success. He did not destroy the city or kingdom, but did that which just accomplished the first threatening of mischief by Babylon. It was denounced against Hezekiah, for showing his treasures to the king



of Babylon's ambassadors (Isa. xxxix. 6, 7), that the treasures and the children should be carried away, and, if they had been humbled and reformed by this, hitherto the king of Babylon's power and success should have gone, but *no further*. If less judgments do the work, God will not send greater; but, if not, he will heat the furnace seven times hotter. Let us see what was now done. 1. The vessels of the sanctuary were carried away, *part of them, v. 2*. They fondly trusted to the temple to defend them, though they went on in their iniquity. And now, to show them the vanity of that confidence, the temple is first plundered. Many of the holy vessels which used to be employed in the service of God were taken away by the king of Babylon, those of them, it is likely, which were most valuable, and he brought them as trophies of victory to the *house of his god*, to whom, with a blind devotion, he gave the praise of his success; and having appropriated these vessels, in token of gratitude, to his god, he *put them in the treasury* of his temple. See the righteousness of God; his people had brought the images of other gods into his temple, and now he suffers the vessels of the temple to be carried into the treasuries of those other gods. Note, When men profane the vessels of the sanctuary with their sins it is just with God to profane them by his judgments. It is probable that the treasures of the king's house were rifled, as was foretold, but particular mention is made of the taking away of the *vessels of the sanctuary* because we shall find afterwards that the profanation of them was that which filled up the measure of the Chaldeans' iniquity, *ch. v. 3*. But observe, It was only *part of them* that went now; some were left them yet upon trial, to see if they would take the right course to prevent the carrying away of the remainder. See Jer. xxvii. 18. 2. The children and young men, especially such as were of noble or royal extraction, that were slightly and promising, and of good natural parts, were carried away. Thus was the iniquity of the fathers visited upon the children. These were taken away by Nebuchadnezzar, (1.) As trophies, to be made a show of for the evidencing and magnifying of his success. (2.) As hostages for the fidelity of their parents in their own land, who would be concerned to conduct themselves well that their children might have the better treatment. (3.) As a seed to serve him. He took them away to train them up for employments and preferments under him, either out of an unaccountable affectation, which great men often have, to be attended by foreigners, though they be blacks, rather than by those of their own nation, or because he knew that there were no such witty, sprightly, ingenious young men to be found among his Chaldeans as abounded among the youth of Israel; and, if that were so, it was much for

the honour of the Jewish nation, as of an uncommon genius above other people, and a fruit of the blessing. But it was a shame that a people who had so much wit should have so little wisdom and grace. Now observe, [1.] The directions which the king of Babylon gave for the choice of these youths, *v. 4*. They must not choose such as were deformed in body, but comely and well-favoured, whose countenances were indexes of ingenuity and good humour. But that is not enough; they must be *skilful in all wisdom, and cunning, or well-seen in knowledge, and understanding science*, such as were quick and sharp, and could give a ready and intelligent account of their own country and of the learning they had hitherto been brought up in. He chose such as were young, because they would be pliable and tractable, would forget their own people and incorporate with the Chaldeans. He had an eye to what he designed them for; they must be such as had ability in them to *stand in the king's palace*, not only to attend his royal person, but to preside in his affairs. This is an instance of the policy of this rising monarch, now in the beginning of his reign, and was a good omen of his prosperity, that he was in care to raise up a succession of persons fit for public business. He did not, like Ahasuerus, appoint them to choose him out young women for the service of his lusts, but young men for the service of his government. It is the interest of princes to have wise men employed under them; it is therefore their wisdom to take care for the finding out and training up of such. It is the misery of this world that so many who are fit for public stations are buried in obscurity, and so many who are unfit for them are preferred to them. [2.] The care which he took concerning them. *First*, For their education. He ordered that they should be taught *the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans*. They are supposed to be wise and knowing young men, and yet they must be further taught. *Give instructions to a wise man and he will increase in learning*. Note, Those that would do good in the world when they grow up must learn when they are young. That is the learning age; if that time be lost, it will hardly be redeemed. It does not appear that Nebuchadnezzar designed they should learn the unlawful arts that were used among the Chaldeans, magic and divination; if he did, Daniel and his fellows would not defile themselves with them. Nay, we do not find that he ordered them to be taught the religion of the Chaldeans, by which it appears that he was at this time no bigot; if men were skilful and faithful, and fit for his business, it was not material to him what religion they were of, provided they had but some religion. They must be trained up in the language and laws of the country, in history, philosophy, and mathematics, in the arts of husbandry, war,



and navigation, in such learning as might qualify them to serve their generation. Note, It is real service to the public to provide for the good education of youth. *Secondly*, For their maintenance. He provided for them *three years*, not only necessities, but dainties for their encouragement in their studies. They had *daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank*, v. 5. This was an instance of his generosity and humanity; though they were his captives, he considered their birth and quality, their spirit and genius, and treated them honourably, and studied to make their captivity easy to them. There is a respect due to those who are well-born and bred when they have fallen into distress. With a liberal education there should be a liberal maintenance.

III. A particular account of Daniel and his fellows. They were of the *children of Judah*, the royal tribe, and probably of the house of David, which had grown a numerous family; and God told Hezekiah that of the children that should *issue from him* some should be taken and made eunuchs, or chamberlains, *in the palace of the king of Babylon*. The prince of the eunuchs changed the names of Daniel and his fellows, partly to show his authority over them and their subjection to him, and partly in token of their being naturalized and made Chaldeans. Their Hebrew names, which they received at their circumcision, had something of God, or Jah, in them: *Daniel—God is my Judge; Hananiah—The grace of the Lord; Mishael—He that is the strong God; Azariah—The Lord is a help*. To make them forget the God of their fathers, the guide of their youth, they give them names that savour of the Chaldean idolatry. *Belteshazzar* signifies the *keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel*; *Shadrach—The inspiration of the sun*, which the Chaldeans worshipped; *Meshaiah—Of the goddess Shach*, under which name Venus was worshipped; *Abed-nego, The servant of the shining fire*, which they worshipped also. Thus, though they would not force them from the religion of their fathers to that of their conquerors, yet they did what they could by fair means insensibly to wean them from the former and instil the latter into them. Yet see how comfortably they were provided for; though they suffered for their fathers' sins they were preferred for their own merits, and the land of their captivity was made more comfortable to them than the land of their nativity at this time would have been.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile him-

self. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which *are* of your sort? then shall ye make *me* endanger my head to the king. 11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. 16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

We observe here, very much to our satisfaction,

I. That Daniel was a favourite with the prince of the eunuchs (v. 9), as Joseph was with the keeper of the prison; he had a *tender love* for him. No doubt Daniel deserved it, and recommended himself by his ingenuity and sweetness of temper (he was *greatly beloved*, ch. ix. 23); and yet it is said here that it was God that brought him into favour with the prince of the eunuchs, for every one does not meet with acceptance according to his merits. Note, The interest which we think we make for ourselves we must acknowledge to be God's gift, and must ascribe to him the glory of it. Whoever are in favour, it is God that has brought them into favour; and it is by him that they find good understanding. Herein was again verified that word (Ps. cvi. 46), *He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives*. Let young ones know that the way to be acceptable is to be tractable and dutiful.

II. That Daniel was still firm to his religion. They had changed his name, but they could not change his nature. Whatever they pleased to call him, he still retained the spirit of an Israelite indeed. He would apply his mind as closely as any of them to his books, and took pains to make himself mas-



ter of the *learning and tongue of the Chaldeans*, but he was resolved that *he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat*, he would not meddle with it, nor with the wine which he drank, v. 8. And having communicated his purpose, with the reasons of it, to his fellows, they concurred in the same resolution, as appears, v. 11. This was not out of sullenness, or peevishness, or a spirit of contradiction, but from a principle of conscience. Perhaps it was not in itself unlawful for him to eat of the king's meat or to drink of his wine. But, 1. They were scrupulous concerning the meat, lest it should be sinful. Sometimes such meat would be set before them as was expressly forbidden by their law, as swine's flesh; or they were afraid lest it should have been offered in sacrifice to an idol, or blessed in the name of an idol. The Jews were distinguished from other nations very much by their meats (Lev. xi. 45, 46), and these pious young men, being in a strange country, thought themselves obliged to keep up the honour of their being a peculiar people. Though they could not keep up their dignity as princes, they would not lose it as Israelites; for on that they most valued themselves. Note, When God's people are in Babylon they have need to take special care that they *partake not in her sins*. Providence seemed to lay this meat before them; being captives they must eat what they could get and must not disoblige their masters; yet, if the command be against it, they must abide by that. Though Providence says, *Kill and eat*, conscience says, *Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has come into my mouth*. 2. They were jealous over themselves, lest, though it should not be sinful in itself, it should be an *occasion of sin* to them, lest, by indulging their appetites with these dainties, they should grow sinful, and voluptuous, and in love with the pleasures of Babylon. They had learned David's prayer, *Let me not eat of their dainties* (Ps. cxli. 4), and Solomon's precept, *Be not desirous of dainties, for they are deceitful meat* (Prov. xxiii. 3), and accordingly they form their resolution. Note, It is very much the praise of all, and especially of young people, to be dead to the delights of sense, not to covet them, not to relish them, but to look upon them with indifference. Those that would excel in wisdom and piety must learn betimes to *keep under the body and bring it into subjection*. 3. However, they thought it unseasonable now, when Jerusalem was in distress, and they themselves were in captivity. They had no heart to drink wine in bowls, so much were they grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Though they had royal blood in their veins, yet they did not think it proper to have royal dainties in their mouths when they were thus brought low. Note, It becomes us to be humble under humbling providences. *Call me not Ncomi; call me*

*Marah*. See the benefit of affliction; by the account Jeremiah gives of the princes and great men now at Jerusalem it appears that they were very corrupt and wicked, and defiled themselves with things offered to idols, while these young gentlemen that were in captivity would not defile themselves, no, not with their *portion of the king's meat*. How much better is it with those that retain their integrity in the depths of affliction than with those that retain their iniquity in the heights of prosperity! Observe, The great thing that Daniel avoided was defiling himself with the pollutions of sin; that is the thing we should be more afraid of than of any outward trouble. Daniel, having taken up this resolution, *requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself*, not only that he might not be compelled to do it, but that he might not be tempted to do it, that the bait might not be laid before him, that he might not see the portion appointed him of the king's meat, nor look upon the wine when it was red. It will be easier to keep the temptation at a distance than to suffer it to come near and then be forced to *put a knife to our throat*. Note, We cannot better improve our interest in any with whom we have found favour than by making use of them to keep us from sin.

III. That God wonderfully owned him herein. When Daniel requested that he might have none of the king's meat or wine set before him the prince of the eunuchs objected that, if he and his fellows were not found in as good case as any of their companions, he should be in danger of having anger and of losing his head, v. 10. Daniel, to satisfy him that there would be no danger of any bad consequence, desires the matter might be put to a trial. He applies himself further to the under-officer, Melzar, or the steward: "*Prove us for ten days*; during that time let us have nothing but *pulse to eat*, nothing but herbs and fruits, or parched peas or lentils, and nothing but *water to drink*, and see how we can live upon that, and proceed accordingly," v. 13. People will not believe the benefit of abstemiousness and a spare diet, nor how much it contributes to the health of the body, unless they try it. Trial was accordingly made. Daniel and his fellows lived for ten days upon *pulse and water*, hard fare for young men of genteel extraction and education, and which one would rather expect they should have indented against than petitioned for; but at the end of the ten days they were compared with the other children, and were found *fairer and fatter in flesh*, of a more healthful look and a better complexion, than all those who did eat the portion of the king's meat, v. 15. This was in part a natural effect of their temperance, but it must be ascribed to the special blessing of God, which will make a little to go a great way, a *dinner of herbs* better than a *stalled ox*. By this it appears



that *man lives not by bread alone*; pulse and water shall be the most nourishing food if God speak the word. See what it is to keep ourselves pure from the pollutions of sin; it is the way to have that comfort and satisfaction which will be *health to the navel and marrow to the bones*, while the pleasures of sin are *rottenness to the bones*.

IV. That his master countenanced him. The steward did not force them to eat against their consciences, but, as they desired, *gave them pulse and water* (v. 16), the pleasures of which they enjoyed, and we have reason to think were not envied the enjoyment. Here is a great example of temperance and contentment with mean things; and (as Epicurus said) "he that lives according to nature will never be poor, but he that lives according to opinion will never be rich." This wonderful abstemiousness of these young men in the days of their youth contributed to the fitting of them, 1. For their eminent services. Hereby they kept their minds clear and unclouded, and fit for contemplation, and saved for the best employments a great deal both of time and thought; and thus they prevented those diseases which indispose men for the business of age that owe their rise to the intemperances of youth. 2. For their eminent sufferings. Those that had thus inured themselves to hardship, and lived a life of self-denial and mortification, could the more easily venture upon the fiery furnace and the den of lions, rather than sin against God.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued *even* unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Concerning Daniel and his fellows we have here,

I. Their great attainments in learning, v. 17. They were very sober and diligent, and studied hard; and we may suppose their tutors, finding them of an uncommon capacity, took a great deal of pains with them,

but, after all, their achievements are ascribed to God only. It was he that *gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom*; for *every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights*. It is the Lord our God that *gives men power to get this wealth*; the mind is furnished only by him that formed it. The great learning which God gave these four children was, 1. A balance for their losses. They had, for the iniquity of their fathers, been deprived of the honours and pleasures that would have attended their noble extraction; but, to make them amends for that, God, in giving them learning, gave them better honours and pleasures than those they had been deprived of. 2. A recompence for their integrity. They kept to their religion, even in the minutest instances of it, and would not so much as defile themselves with the king's meat or wine, but became, in effect, Nazarites; and now God rewarded them for it with an eminency in learning; for God *gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy* with them, Eccl. ii. 26. To Daniel he gave a double portion; he had *understanding in visions and dreams*; he knew how to interpret dreams, as Joseph, not by rules of art, such as are pretended to be given by the oneirocritics, but by a divine sagacity and wisdom which God gave him. Nay, he was endued with a prophetic spirit, by which he was enabled to converse with God, and to receive the notices of divine things in dreams and visions, Num. xii. 6. According to this gift given to Daniel, we find him, in this book, all along employed about dreams and visions, interpreting or entertaining them; for, *as every one has received the gift*, so shall he have an opportunity, and so should he have a heart, to *minister the same*, 1 Pet. iv. 10.

II. Their great acceptance with the king. After *three years* spent in their education (they being of some maturity, it is likely, when they came, perhaps about twenty years old) they were presented to the king with the rest that were of their standing, v. 18. And the king examined them and *communed with them* himself, v. 19. He could do it, being a man of parts and learning himself, else he would not have come to be so great; and he would do it, for it is the wisdom of princes, in the choice of the persons they employ, to see with their own eyes, to exercise their own judgment, and not trust too much to the representation of others. The king examined them not so much in the languages, in the rules of oratory or poetry, as in *all matters of wisdom and understanding*, the rules of prudence and true politics; he enquired into their judgment about the due conduct of human life and public affairs; not, "Were they vits?" but, "Were they wise?" And he not only found them to excel the young candidates for preferment that were of their own standing, but found that they had *more understanding than the ancients*,



than all their teachers, Ps. cxix. 99, 100. So far was the king from being partial to his own countrymen, to seniors, to those of his own religion and of an established reputation, that he freely owned that, upon trial, he found those poor young captive Jews ten times wiser and *better than all the magicians that were in all his realm*, v. 20. He was soon aware of something extraordinary in these young men, and, which gave him a surprising satisfaction, was soon aware that a little of their true divinity was preferable to a great deal of the divination he had been used to. *What is the chaff to the wheat?* what are the magicians' rods to Aaron's? There was no comparison between them. These four young students were better, were *ten times better*, than all the old practitioners, put them all together, that were in *all his realm*, and we may be sure that they were not a few. This contempt did God pour upon the pride of the Chaldeans, and this honour did he put upon the low estate of his own people; and thus did he make not only these persons, but the rest of their nation for their sakes, the more respected in the land of their captivity. *Lastly*, This judgment being given concerning them, they *stood before the king* (v. 19); they attended in the presence-chamber, nay, and in the council-chamber, for to *see the king's face* is the periphrasis of a privy-counsellor, Esth. i. 14. This confirms Solomon's observation, *Seest thou a man diligent in his business*, sober and humble? *he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men*. Industry is the way to preferment. How long the other three were about the court we are not told; but Daniel, for his part, *continued to the first year of Cyrus* (v. 21), though not always alike in favour and reputation. He lived and prophesied after the first year of Cyrus; but that is mentioned to intimate that he lived to see the deliverance of his people out of their captivity and their return to their own land. Note, Sometimes God favours his servants that mourn with Zion in her sorrows to let them live to see better times with the church than they saw in the beginning of their days and to share with her in her joys.

## CHAP. II.

It was said (ch. i. 17) that Daniel had understanding in dreams; and here we have an early and eminent instance of it, which soon made him famous in the court of Babylon, as Joseph by the same means came to be so in the court of Egypt. This chapter is a history, but it is the history of a prophecy, by a dream and the interpretation of it. Pharaoh's dream, and Joseph's interpretation of it, related only to the years of plenty and famine and the interest of God's Israel in them; but Nebuchadnezzar's dream here, and Daniel's interpretation of that, look much higher, to the four monarchies, and the concerns of Israel in them, and the kingdom of the Messiah, which should be set up in the world upon the ruins of them. In this chapter we have, I. The great perplexity that Nebuchadnezzar was put into by a dream which he had forgotten, and his command to the magicians to tell him what it was, which they could not pretend to do, ver. 1—11. II. Orders given for the destroying of all the wise men of Babylon, and of Daniel among the rest, with his fellows, ver. 12—15. III. The discovery of this secret to him, in answer to prayer, and the thanksgiving he offered up to God thereupon, ver. 16—23. IV. His admission to the king, and the discovery he made to him both of his dream and of the interpretation of it, ver. 24—45. V. The great honour which Nebu-

chadnezzar put upon Daniel, in recompence for this service, and the preferment of his companions with him, ver. 46—49.

AND in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. 3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. 4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriac, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation. 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. 6 But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. 7 They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it. 8 The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. 9 But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, *there is but one decree for you*: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof. 10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter: therefore *there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean*. 11 And *it is a rare thing* that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. 12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious,



and commanded to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. 13 And the decree went forth that the wise *men* should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.

We meet with a great difficulty in the date of this story; it is said to be in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, *v. 1*. Now Daniel was carried to Babylon in his first year, and, it should seem, he was three years under tutors and governors before he was presented to the king, *ch. i. 5*. How then could this happen in *the second year*? Perhaps, though three years were appointed for the education of other children, yet Daniel was so forward that he was taken into business when he had been but one year at school, and so in the second year he became thus considerable. Some make it to be the second year after he began to reign alone, but the fifth or sixth year since he began to reign in partnership with his *father*. Some read it, *and in the second year* (the second after Daniel and his fellows stood before the king), *in the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, or in his reign*, this happened; as Joseph, in the second year after his skill in dreams, showed and expounded Pharaoh's, so Daniel, in the second year after he commenced master in that art, did this service. I would much rather take it some of these ways than suppose, as some do, that it was in the second year after he had conquered Egypt, which was the thirty-sixth year of his reign, because it appears, by what we meet with in Ezekiel, that Daniel was famous both for wisdom and prevalence in prayer long before that; and therefore this passage, or story, which shows how he came to be so eminent for both these must be laid early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Now here we may observe,

I. The perplexity that Nebuchadnezzar was in by reason of a dream which he had dreamed but had forgotten (*v. 1*): *He dreamed dreams*, that is, a dream consisting of divers distinct parts, or which filled his head as much as if it had been many dreams. Solomon speaks of a *multitude of dreams*, strangely incoherent, in which *there are divers vanities*, Eccl. v. 7. This dream of Nebuchadnezzar's had nothing in the thing itself but what might be paralleled in many a common dream, in which are often represented to men things as foreign as are here mentioned; but there was something in the impression it made upon him which carried with it an incontestable evidence of its divine original and its prophetic significancy. Note, The greatest of men are not exempt from, nay, they lie most open to, those cares and troubles of mind which disturb their repose in the night, while the *sleep of the labouring man is sweet* and sound, and the sleep of the sober temperate man free from confused dreams. The abundance of the rich will

not suffer them to sleep at all for care, and the excesses of gluttons and drunkards will not suffer them to sleep quietly for dreaming. But this recorded here was not from natural causes. Nebuchadnezzar was a troubler of God's Israel, but God here troubled him; for he that made the soul can *make his sword to approach to it*. He had his guards about him, but they could not keep trouble from his spirit. We know not the uneasiness of many that live in great pomp, and, one would think, in pleasure too. We look into their houses, and are tempted to envy them; but, could we look into their hearts, we should pity them rather. All the treasures and all the delights of the children of men, which this mighty monarch had the command of, could not procure him a little repose, when by reason of the trouble of his mind his *sleep broke from him*. But God *gives his beloved sleep*, who return to him as their rest.

II. The trial that he made of his magicians and astrologers whether they could tell him what his dream was, which he had forgotten. They were immediately sent for, to *show the king his dreams*, *v. 2*. There are many things which we retain the impressions of, and yet have lost the images of the things; though we cannot tell what the matter was, we know how we were affected with it; so it was with this king. His dream had slipped out of his mind, and he could not possibly recollect it, but he was confident he should know it if he heard it again. God ordered it so that Daniel might have the more honour, and, in him, the God of Daniel. Note, God sometimes serves his own purposes by putting things out of men's minds as well as by putting things into their minds. The magicians, it is likely, were proud of their being sent for into the king's bed-chamber, to give him a taste of their office, not doubting but it would be for their honour. He tells them that he had *dreamed a dream*, *v. 3*. They speak to him in the Syriac tongue, which was then the same with the Chaldee, but now they differ much. And henceforward Daniel uses that language, or dialect of the Hebrew, for the same reason that those words, Jer. x. 11, are in that language, because designed to convince the Chaldeans of the folly of their idolatry and to bring them to the knowledge and worship of the true and living God, which the stories of these chapters have a direct tendency to. But *ch. viii.* and forward, being intended for the comfort of the Jews, is written in their peculiar language. They, in their answer, complimented the king with their good wishes, desired him to tell his dream, and undertook with all possible assurance to interpret it, *v. 4*. But the king insisted upon it that they must tell him the dream itself, because he had forgotten it and could not tell it to them. And, if they could not do this, they should all be put to death as deceivers (*v. 5*), themselves



cut to pieces and their houses made a dung-hill. If they could, they should be rewarded and preferred, v. 6. And they knew, as Balaam did concerning Balak, that he was able to promote them to great honour, and give them that wages of unrighteousness which, like him, they loved so dearly. No question therefore that they will do their utmost to gratify the king; if they do not, it is not for want of good-will, but for want of power, Providence so ordering it that the magicians of Babylon might now be as much confounded and put to shame as of old the magicians of Egypt had been, that, how much soever his people were both in Egypt and Babylon vilified and made contemptible, his oracles might in both be magnified and made honourable, by the silencing of those that set up in competition with them. The magicians, having reason on their side, insist upon it that the king must tell them the dream, and then, if they do not tell him the interpretation of it, it is their fault, v. 7. But arbitrary power is deaf to reason. The king falls into a passion, gives them hard words, and, without any colour of reason, suspects that they could tell him but would not; and instead of upbraiding them with impotency, and the deficiency of their art, as he might justly have done, he charges them with a combination to affront him: *You have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me.* How unreasonable and absurd is this imputation! If they had undertaken to tell him what his dream was, and had imposed upon him with a sham, he might have charged them with lying and corrupt words; but to say this of them when they honestly confessed their own weakness only shows what senseless things indulged passions are, and how apt great men are to think it is their prerogative to pursue their humour in defiance of reason and equity, and all the dictates of both. When the magicians begged of him to tell them the dream, though the request was highly rational and just, he tells them that they did but dally with him, to gain time (v. 8), *till the time be changed* (v. 9), either till the king's desire to know his dream be over, and he grown indifferent whether he be told it or no, though now he is so hot upon it, or till they may hope he has so perfectly forgotten his dream (the remaining shades of which are slipping from him apace as he catches at them) that they may tell him what they please and make him believe it was his dream, and, when the thing which is going, is quite *gone from him*, as it will be in a little time, he will not be able to disprove them. And therefore, without delay, they must tell him the dream. In vain do they plead, 1. That there is *no man on earth* that can retrieve the king's dream, v. 10. There are settled rules by which to discover what the meaning of the dream was; whether they will hold or no is the question. But never were any rules offered to be given

by which to discover what the dream was; they cannot work unless they have something to work upon. They acknowledge that the gods may indeed *declare unto man what is his thought* (Amos iv. 13), for God *understands our thoughts afar off* (Ps. cxxxix. 2), what they will be before we think them, what they are when we do not regard them, and what they have been when we have forgotten them. But those who can do this are gods, that *have not their dwelling with flesh* (v. 11), and it is they alone that can do this. As for men, their *dwelling is with flesh*; the wisest and greatest of men are clouded with a veil of flesh, which quite obstructs and confounds all their acquaintance with spirits, and their powers and operations; but the gods, that are themselves pure spirits, know what is in man. See here an instance of the ignorance of these magicians, that they speak of many gods, whereas there is but one and can be but one infinite; yet see their knowledge of that which even the light of nature teaches and the works of nature prove, that there is a God, who is a Spirit, and perfectly knows the spirits of men and all their thoughts, so as it is not possible that any man should. This confession of the divine omniscience is here extorted from these idolaters, to the honour of God and their own condemnation, who though they knew there is a God in heaven, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secret is hid, yet offered up their prayers and praises to dumb idols, that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not. 2. That there is no king on earth that would expect or require such a thing, v. 10. This intimates that they were kings, lords, and potentates, not ordinary people, that the magicians had most dealings with, and at whose devotion they were, while the oracles of God and the gospel of Christ are dispensed to the poor. Kings and potentates have often required unreasonable things of their subjects, but they think that never any required so unreasonable a thing as this, and therefore hope his imperial majesty will not insist upon it. But it is all in vain; when passion is in the throne reason is under foot: He was *angry and very furious*, v. 12. Note, It is very common for those that will not be convinced by reason to be provoked and exasperated by it, and to push on with fury what they cannot support with equity.

III. The doom passed upon all the magicians of Babylon. There is but *one decree for them all* (v. 9); they all stand condemned without exception or distinction. The decree has gone forth, they must every man of them be slain (v. 13), Daniel and his fellows (though they knew nothing of the matter) not excepted. See here, 1. What are commonly the unjust proceedings of arbitrary power. Nebuchadnezzar is here a tyrant in true colours, speaking death when he cannot speak sense, and treating those as traitors whose only fault is that they would serve

him, but cannot. 2. What is commonly the just punishment of pretenders. How unrighteous soever Nebuchadnezzar was in this sentence, as to the ringleaders in the imposture, God was righteous. Those that imposed upon men, in pretending to do what they could not do, are now sentenced to death for not being able to do what they did not pretend to.

14 Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise *men* of Babylon: 15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, *Why is the decree so hasty from the king?* Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. 16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation. 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: 18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise *men* of Babylon. 19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night-vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. 23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast *now* made known unto us the king's matter.

When the king sent for his wise men to tell them his dream, and the interpretation of it (v. 2), Daniel, it seems, was not summoned to appear among them; the king, though he was highly pleased with him when he examined him, and thought him *ten times* wiser than the rest of his wise men, yet forgot him when he had most occasion for him; and no wonder, when all was done in a

heat, and nothing with a cool and deliberate thought. But Providence so ordered it, that the magicians being nonplussed might be the more taken notice of, and so the more glory might redound to the God of Daniel. But, though Daniel had not the honour to be consulted with the rest of the wise men, contrary to all law and justice, by an undistinguishing sentence, he stands condemned with them, and till he has notice brought him to prepare for execution he knows nothing of the matter. How miserable is the case of those who live under an arbitrary government, as this of Nebuchadnezzar's! How happy are we, whose lives are under the protection of the law and methods of justice, and lie not thus at the mercy of a peevish and capricious prince!

We have found already, in Ezekiel, that Daniel was famous both for prudence and prayer; as a prince he had power with God and man; by prayer he had power with God, by prudence he had power with man, and in both he prevailed. Thus did he *find favour and good understanding* in the sight of both, and in these verses we have a remarkable instance of both.

I. Daniel by prudence knew how to deal with men, and he prevailed with them. When *Arioch, the captain of the guard*, that was appointed to slay all the wise men of Babylon, the whole college of them, seized Daniel (for the sword of tyranny, like the sword of war, *devours one as well as another*), he *answered with counsel and wisdom* (v. 14); he did not fall into a passion, and reproach the king as unjust and barbarous, much less did he contrive how to make resistance, but mildly asked, *Why is the decree so hasty?* v. 15. And whereas the rest of the wise men had insisted upon it that it was utterly impossible for him ever to have his demand gratified, which did but make him more outrageous, Daniel undertakes, if he may but have a little time allowed him, to give the king all the satisfaction he desired, v. 16. The king, being now sensible of his error in not sending for Daniel sooner, whose character he began to recollect, was soon prevailed upon to respite the judgment, and make trial of Daniel. Note, The likeliest method to turn away wrath, even the wrath of a king, which is as the messenger of death, is by a *soft answer*, by that yielding which *pacifies great offences*; thus, though *where the word of a king is there is power*, yet even that word may be repelled, and that so as to be repealed; and so some read it here (v. 14): *Then Daniel returned, and stayed the counsel and edict, through Arioch, the king's provost-marshal.*

II. Daniel knew how by prayer to converse with God, and he found favour with him, both in petition and in thanksgiving, which are the two principal parts of prayer. Observe,

1. His humble petition for this mercy, that



God would discover to him what was the king's dream, and the interpretation of it. When he had gained time he did not go to consult with the rest of the wise men whether there was any thing in their art, in their books, that might be of use in this matter, but *went to his house*, there to be alone with his God, for from him alone, who is the Father of lights, he expected this great gift. Observe, (1.) He did not only pray for this discovery himself, but he engaged his companions to pray for it too. He *made the thing known* to those who had been all along his bosom-friends and associates, requesting *that they would desire mercy of God concerning this secret*, v. 17, 18. Though Daniel was probably their senior, and every way excelled them, yet he engaged them as partners with him in this matter, *Vis unita fortior*—*The union of forces produces greater force*. See Esth. iv. 16. Note, Praying friends are valuable friends; it is good to have an intimacy with and an interest in those that have fellowship with God and an interest at the throne of grace; and it well becomes the greatest and best of men to desire the assistance of the prayers of others for them. St. Paul often entreats his friends to pray for him. Thus we must show that we put a value upon our friends, upon prayer, upon their prayers. (2.) He was particular in this prayer, but had an eye to, and a dependence upon, the general mercy of God: *That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret*, v. 18. We ought in prayer to look up to God as the *God of heaven*, a God above us, and who has dominion over us, to whom we owe adoration and allegiance, a God of power, who can do every thing. Our Saviour has taught us to pray to God as *our Father in heaven*. And, whatever good we pray for, our dependence must be upon the *mercies of God* for it, and an interest in those mercies we must desire; we can expect nothing by way of recompence for our merits, but all as the gift of God's mercies. They desired mercy *concerning this secret*. Note, Whatever is the matter of our care must be the matter of our prayer; we must desire mercy of God concerning this thing and the other thing that occasions us trouble and fear. God gives us leave to be humbly free with him, and in prayer to enter into the detail of our wants and burdens. *Secret things belong to the Lord our God*, and therefore, if there be any mercy we stand in need of that concerns a secret, to him we must apply; and, though we cannot in faith pray for miracles, yet we may in faith pray to him who has all hearts in his hand, and who in his providence does wonders without miracles, for the discovery of that which is out of our view and the obtaining of that which is out of our reach, as far as is for his glory and our good, believing that to him nothing is hidden, nothing is hard. (3.) Their plea with God was

the imminent peril they were in; they desired mercy of God in this matter, that so Daniel and his fellows might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon, that the righteous might not be destroyed with the wicked. Note, When the lives of good and useful men are in danger it is time to be earnest with God for mercy for them, as for Peter in prison, Acts xii. 5. (4.) The mercy which Daniel and his fellows prayed for was bestowed. *The secret was revealed unto Daniel in a night-vision*, v. 19. Some think he dreamed the same dream, when he was asleep, that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed; it should rather seem that when he was awake, and continuing instant in prayer, and watching in the same, the dream itself, and the interpretation of it, were communicated to him by the ministry of an angel, abundantly to his satisfaction. Note, *The effectual fervent prayer of righteous men avails much*. There are mysteries and secrets which by prayer we are let into; with that key the cabinets of heaven are unlocked, for Christ has said, *Thus knock, and it shall be opened unto you*.

2. His grateful thanksgiving for this mercy when he had received it: *Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven*, v. 19. He did not stay till he had told it to the king, and seen whether he would own it to be his dream or no, but was confident that it was so, and that he had gained his point, and therefore he immediately turned his prayers into praises. As he had prayed in a full assurance that God would do this for him, so he gave thanks in a full assurance that he had done it; and in both he had an eye to God as the *God of heaven*. His prayer was not recorded, but his thanksgiving is. Observe,

(1.) The honour he gives to God in this thanksgiving, which he studies to do in a great variety and copiousness of expression: *Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever*. There is that *for ever* in God which is to be blessed and praised; it is unchangeably and eternally in him. And it is to be blessed *for ever and ever*; as the matter of praise is God's eternal perfection, so the work of praise shall be everlastingly in the doing. [1.] He gives to God the glory of what he is in himself: *Wisdom and might are his, wisdom and courage* (so some); whatever is fit to be done he will do; whatever he will do he can do, he dares do, and he will be sure to do it in the best manner, for he has infinite wisdom to design and contrive and infinite power to execute and accomplish. *With him are strength and wisdom*, which in men are often parted. [2.] He gives him the glory of what he is to the world of mankind. He has a universal influence and agency upon all the children of men, and all their actions and affairs. Are the times changed? Is the posture of affairs altered? Does every thing lie open to mutability? It is God that *changes the times and the seasons*, and the face



of them. No change comes to pass by chance, but according to the will and counsel of God. Are those that were kings removed and deposed? Do they abdicate? Are they laid aside? It is God that *removes kings*. Are the *poor raised out of the dust*, to be set *among princes*? It is God that *sets up kings*; and the making and unmaking of kings is a flower of his crown who is the fountain of all power, *King of kings* and *Lord of lords*. Are there men that excel others in wisdom, philosophers and statesmen, that think above the common rate, contemplative penetrating men? It is *God that gives wisdom to the wise*, whether they be so wise as to acknowledge it or no; they have it not of themselves, but it is he that *gives knowledge to those that know understanding*, which is a good reason why we should not be proud of our knowledge, and why we should serve and honour God with it and make it our business to know him. [3.] He gives him the glory of this particular discovery. He praises him, *First*, For that he could make such a discovery (v. 22): *He reveals the deep and secret things* which are hidden from the eyes of all living. It was he that revealed to man what is true wisdom when none else could (Job xxviii. 27, 28); it is he that reveals things to come to his servants the prophets. He does himself perfectly discern and distinguish that which is most closely and most industriously concealed, for he will *bring into judgment every secret thing*; the truth will be evident in the great day. He *knows what is in the darkness*, and what is done in the darkness, for that *hides not from him*, Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12. *The light dwells with him*, and he *dwells in the light* (1 Tim. vi. 16), and yet, as to us, he *makes darkness his pavilion*. Some understand it of the light of prophecy and divine revelation, which dwells with God and is derived from him; for he is the *Father of lights*, of all lights; they are all at home in him. *Secondly*, For that he had made this discovery to him. Here he has an eye to God as the *God of his fathers*; for, though the Jews were now captives in Babylon, yet they were *beloved for their fathers' sake*. He praises God, who is the fountain of wisdom and might, for the wisdom and might he had given him, wisdom to know this great secret and might to bear the discovery. Note, What wisdom and might we have we must acknowledge to be God's gift. *Thou hast made this known to me*, v. 23. What was hidden from the celebrated Chaldeans, who made the interpreting of dreams their profession, is revealed to Daniel, a captive-Jew, a babe, much their junior. God would hereby put honour upon the *Spirit of prophecy* just when he was putting contempt upon the *spirit of divination*. Was Daniel thus thankful to God for making known that to him which was the saving of the lives of him and his fellows? Much more reason

have we to be thankful to him for making known to us the great salvation of the soul, to us and *not to the world*, to us and *not to the wise and prudent*.

(2.) The respect he puts upon his companions in this thanksgiving. Though it was by his prayers principally that this discovery was obtained, and to him that it was made, yet he owns their partnership with him, both in praying for it (it is what *we desired of thee*) and in enjoying it—*Thou hast made known unto us the king's matter*. Either they were present with Daniel when the discovery was made to him, or as soon as he knew it he told it them (*ἔρηκα, ἔρηκα—I have found it, I have found it*), that those who had assisted him with their prayers might assist him in their praises; his joining them with him is an instance of his humility and modesty, which well become those that are taken into communion with God. Thus St. Paul sometimes joins Sylvanus, Timotheus, or some other minister, with himself in the inscriptions to many of his epistles. Note, What honour God puts upon us we should be willing that our brethren may share with us in.

24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise *men* of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise *men* of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation. 25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation. 26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? 27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; 28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; 29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh



known to thee what shall come to pass. 30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for *any* wisdom that I have more than any living, but for *their* sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

We have here the introduction to Daniel's declaring the dream, and the interpretation of it.

I. He immediately bespoke the reversing of the sentence against the wise men of Babylon, *v. 24*. He went with all speed to Arioch, to tell him that his commission was now superseded: *Destroy not the wise men of Babylon*. Though there were those of them perhaps that deserved to die, as magicians, by the law of God, yet here that which they stood condemned for was not a crime worthy of death or of bonds, and therefore let them not die, and be *unjustly destroyed*, but let them live, and be justly shamed, as having been nonplussed and unable to do that which a prophet of the Lord could do. Note, Since God shows common kindness to the evil and good, we should do so too, and be ready to save the lives even of bad men, *Matt. v. 45*. A good man is a common good. To Paul in the ship God gave the souls of all that sailed with him; they were saved for his sake. To Daniel was owing the preservation of all the wise men, who yet rendered not according to the benefit done to them, *ch. iii. 8*.

II. He offered his service, with great assurance, to go to the king, and tell him his dream and the interpretation of it, and was admitted accordingly, *v. 24, 25*. Arioch brought him in haste to the king, hoping to ingratiate himself by introducing Daniel; he pretends he had sought him to interpret the king's dream, whereas really it was to execute upon him the king's sentence that he sought him. But courtiers' business is every way to humour the prince and make their own services acceptable.

III. He contrived as much as might be to reflect shame upon the magicians, and to give honour to God, upon this occasion. The king owned that it was a bold undertaking, and questioned whether he could make it good (*v. 26*): *Art thou able to make known unto me the dream?* What! Such a babe in this knowledge, such a stripling as thou art, wilt thou undertake that which thy seniors despair of doing? The less likely it appeared to the king that Daniel should do this the more God was glorified in enabling him to do it. Note, In transmitting divine revelation to the children of men it has been God's usual way to make use of the *weak and foolish things* and persons of *the world*, and such as were *despised* and *despaired of*, to confound the wise and mighty, that the

excellency of the power might be of him, 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. Daniel from this takes occasion, 1. To put the king out of conceit with his magicians and soothsayers, whom he had such great expectations from (*v. 27*): "*This secret they cannot show to the king; it is out of their power; the rules of their art will not reach to it. Therefore let not the king be angry with them for not doing that which they cannot do; but rather despise them, and cast them off, because they cannot do it.*" Broughton reads it generally: "This secret *no sages, astrologers, enchanters, or entrail-cookers, can show unto the king; let not the king therefore consult them any more.*" Note, The experience we have of the inability of all creatures to give us satisfaction should lessen our esteem of them, and lower our expectations from them. They are baffled in their pretensions; we are baffled in our hopes from them. Hitherto they come, and no further; let us therefore say to them, as Job to his friends, *Now you are nothing; miserable comforters are you all*. 2. To bring him to the knowledge of the one only living and true God, the God whom Daniel worshipped: "Though they cannot find out the secret, let not the king despair of having it found out, for *there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets,*" *v. 28*. Note, The insufficiency of creatures should drive us to the all-sufficiency of the Creator. *There is a God in heaven* (and it is well for us there is) who can do that for us, and make known that to us, which none on earth can, particularly the secret history of the work of redemption and the secret designs of God's love to us therein, the mystery which was *hidden from ages and generations*; divine revelation helps us out where human reason leaves us quite at a loss, and makes known that, not only to kings, but to the poor of this world, which none of the philosophers or politicians of the heathens, with all their oracles and arts of divination to help them, could ever pretend to give us any light into, *Rom. xvi. 25, 26*.

IV. He confirmed the king in his opinion that the dream he was thus solicitous to recover the idea of was really well worth enquiring after, that it was of great value and of vast consequence, not a common dream, the idle disport of a ludicrous and luxuriant fancy, which was not worth remembering or telling again, but that it was a divine discovery, a ray of light darted into his mind from the upper world, relating to the great affairs and revolutions of this lower world. God in it *made known to the king what should be in the latter days* (*v. 28*), that is, in the times that were to come, reaching as far as the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the world, which was to be *in the latter days*, *Heb. i. 1*. And again (*v. 29*): "*The thoughts which came into thy mind* were not the repetitions of what had been before, as our dreams usually are"—

Omnia quæ sensu voluntur vota diurno  
Tempore sopito reddit amica quies—

The sentiments which we indulge throughout the day often mingle with the grateful slumbers of the night.

CLAUDIAN.

"But they were predictions of *what should come to pass hereafter*, which he that *reveals secrets makes known unto thee*; and therefore thou art in the right in taking the hint and pursuing it thus." Note, Things that are to come to pass hereafter are secret things, which God only can reveal; and what he has revealed of those things, especially with reference to the last days of all, to the end of time, ought to be very seriously and diligently enquired into and considered by every one of us. Some think that the *thoughts* which are said to have *come into the king's mind upon his bed, what should come to pass hereafter*, were his own thoughts when he was awake. Just before he fell asleep, and dreamed this dream, he was musing in his own mind what would be the issue of his growing greatness, what his kingdom would hereafter come to; and so the dream was an answer to those thoughts. What discoveries God intends to make he thus prepares men for.

V. He solemnly professes that he could not pretend to have merited from God the favour of this discovery, or to have obtained it by any sagacity of his own (v. 30): "*But, as for me, this secret is not found out by me, but is revealed to me, and that not for any wisdom that I have more than any living, to qualify me for the receiving of such a discovery.*" Note, It well becomes those whom God has highly favoured and honoured to be very humble and low in their own eyes, to lay aside all opinion of their own wisdom and worthiness, that God alone may have all the praise of the good they are, and have, and do, and that all may be attributed to the freeness of his good-will towards them and the fulness of his good work in them. The secret was made known to him not for his own sake, but, 1. For the sake of his people, *for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king*, that is, for the sake of his brethren and companions in tribulation, who had by their prayers helped him to obtain this discovery, and so might be said to make known the interpretation—that their lives might be spared, that they might come into favour and be preferred, and all the people of the Jews might fare the better, in their captivity, for their sakes. Note, Humble men will be always ready to think that what God does for them and by them is more for the sake of others than for their own. 2. For the sake of *his prince*; and some read the former clause in this sense, "*Not for any wisdom of mine, but that the king may know the interpretation, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart*, that thou mightest have satisfaction given thee as to what thou wast before

considering, and thereby instruction given thee how to behave towards the church of God." God revealed this thing to Daniel that he might make it known to the king. Prophets receive that they may give, that the discoveries made to them may not be lodged with themselves, but communicated to the persons that are concerned.

31 Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness *was* excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof *was* terrible. 32 This image's head *was* of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. 36 This *is* the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. 37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold. 39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. 41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. 42 And *as* the toes of the



fee. were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. 43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. 44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. 45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Daniel here gives full satisfaction to Nebuchadnezzar concerning his dream and the interpretation of it. That great prince had been kind to this poor prophet in his maintenance and education; he had been brought up at the king's cost, preferred at court, and the land of his captivity had hereby been made much easier to him than to others of his brethren. And now the king is abundantly repaid for all the expense he had been at upon him; and for receiving this prophet, though not in the name of a prophet, he had a prophet's reward, such a reward as a prophet only could give, and for which that wealthy mighty prince was now glad to be beholden to him. Here is,

I. The dream itself, v. 31, 45. Nebuchadnezzar perhaps was an admirer of statues, and had his palace and gardens adorned with them; however, he was a worshipper of images, and now behold a *great image* is set before him in a dream, which might intimate to him what the images were which he bestowed so much cost upon, and paid such respect to; they were mere dreams. The creatures of fancy might do as well to please the fancy. By the power of imagination he might shut his eyes, and represent to himself what forms he thought fit, and beautify them at his pleasure, without the expense and trouble of sculpture. This was the image of a man erect: *It stood before him*, as a living man; and, because those monarchies which were designed to be represented by it were admirable in the eyes of their friends, the *brightness* of this image was *excellent*; and because they were formidable to their enemies, and dreaded by all about them, the *form* of this image is said to be *terrible*; both the

features of the face and the postures of the body made it so. But that which was most remarkable in this image was the different metals of which it was composed—the *head of gold* (the richest and most durable metal), the *breast and arms of silver* (the next to it in worth), the *belly and sides* (or *thighs*) of *brass*, the *legs of iron* (still baser metals), and lastly the feet *part of iron and part of clay*. See what the things of this world are; the further we go in them the less valuable they appear. In the life of man youth is a head of gold, but it grows less and less worthy of our esteem; and old age is half clay; a man is then as *good as dead*. It is so with the world; later ages degenerate. The first age of the Christian church, of the reformation, was a head of gold; but we live in an age that is iron and clay. Some allude to this in the description of a hypocrite, whose practice is not agreeable to his knowledge. He has a head of gold, but feet of iron and clay: he knows his duty, but does it not. Some observe that in Daniel's visions the monarchies were represented by four beasts (*ch. vii.*), for he looked upon that wisdom from beneath, by which they were turned to be earthly and sensual, and a tyrannical power, to have more in it of the beast than of the man, and so the vision agreed with his notions of the thing. But to Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen prince, they were represented by a gay and pompous image of a man, for he was an admirer of the *kingdoms of this world and the glory of them*. To him the sight was so charming that he was impatient to see it again. But what became of this image? The next part of the dream shows it to us calcined, and brought to nothing. He saw a stone cut out of the quarry by an unseen power, without hands, and this stone fell upon the *feet of the image*, that were of *iron and clay*, and broke them to pieces; and then the image must fall of course, and so the gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, were all broken to pieces together, and beaten so small that they became like the *chaff of the summer threshing-floors*, and there were not to be found any the least remains of them; but the stone cut out of the *mountain* became itself a *great mountain*, and filled the earth. See how God can bring about great effects by weak and unlikely causes; when he pleases a *little one shall become a thousand*. Perhaps the destruction of this image of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, might be intended to signify the abolishing of idolatry out of the world in due time. The *idols of the heathen are silver and gold*, as this image was, and *they shall perish from off the earth and from under these heavens*, Jer. x. 11; Isa. ii. 18. And whatever power destroys idolatry is in the ready way to magnify and exalt itself, as this stone, when it had broken the image to pieces, became a great mountain.

II. The interpretation of this dream. Let



us now see what is the meaning of this. It was from God, and therefore from him it is fit that we take the explication of it. It should seem, Daniel had his fellows with him, and speaks for them as well as for himself, when he says, *We will tell the interpretation, v. 36.* Now,

1. This image represented the kingdoms of the earth that should successively bear rule among the nations and have influence on the affairs of the Jewish church. The four monarchies were not represented by four distinct statues, but by one image, because they were all of one and the same spirit and genius, and all more or less against the church. It was the same power, only lodged in four different nations, the two former lying eastward of Judea, the two latter westward. (1.) The *head of gold* signified the Chaldean monarchy, which was now in being (v. 37, 38): *Thou, O king! art* (or, rather, *shalt be*) *a king of kings*, a universal monarch, to whom many kings and kingdoms shall be tributaries; or, Thou art the *highest of kings* on earth at this time (as a *servant of servants* is the meanest servant); thou dost outshine all other kings. But let him not attribute his elevation to his own politics or fortitude. No; it is the *God of heaven* that has given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory, a kingdom that exercises great authority, stands firmly, and shines brightly, acts by a puissant army with an arbitrary power. Note, The greatest of princes have no power but what is given them from above. The extent of his dominion is set forth (v. 38), that *wheresoever the children of men dwell*, in all the nations of that part of the world, he was *ruler over them all*, over them and all that belonged to them, all their cattle, not only those which they had a property in, but those that were *feræ naturæ*—wild, the *beasts of the field* and the *fowls of the heaven*. He was lord of all the woods, forests, and chases, and none were allowed to hunt or fowl without his leave. Thus “*thou art the head of gold*; thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, for seventy years.” Compare this with Jer. xxv. 9, 11, especially Jer. xxvii. 5—7. There were other powerful kingdoms in the world at this time, as that of the Scythians; but it was the kingdom of Babylon that reigned over the Jews, and that began the government which continued in the succession here described till Christ’s time. It is called a *head*, for its wisdom, eminency, and absolute power, a *head of gold* for its wealth (Isa. xiv. 4); it was a golden city. Some make this monarchy to begin in Nimrod, and so bring into it all the Assyrian kings, about fifty monarchs in all, and compute that it lasted above 1600 years. But it had not been so long a monarchy of such vast extent and power as is here described, nor any thing like it; therefore others make only Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach, and Belshazzar, to belong to this *head of gold*;

and a glorious high throne they had, and perhaps exercised a more despotic power than any of the kings that went before them. Nebuchadnezzar reigned forty-five years current, Evil-merodach twenty-three years current, and Belshazzar three. Babylon was their metropolis, and Daniel was with them upon the spot during the seventy years. (2.) The *breast and arms of silver* signified the monarchy of the Medes and Persians, of which the king is told no more than this, *There shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee* (v. 39), not so rich, powerful, or victorious. This kingdom was founded by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, in alliance with each other, and therefore represented by two arms, meeting in the breast. Cyrus was himself a Persian by his father, a Mede by his mother. Some reckon that this second monarchy lasted 130 years, others 204 years. The former computation agrees best with the scripture chronology. (3.) The *belly and thighs of brass* signified the monarchy of the Grecians, founded by Alexander, who conquered Darius Codomannus, the last of the Persian emperors. This is the *third kingdom, of brass*, inferior in wealth and extent of dominion to the Persian monarchy, but in Alexander himself it shall by the power of the sword *bear rule over all the earth*; for Alexander boasted that he had conquered the world, and then sat down and wept because he had not another world to conquer. (4.) The *legs and feet of iron* signified the Roman monarchy. Some make this to signify the latter part of the Grecian monarchy, the two empires of Syria and Egypt, the former governed by the family of the Seleucidæ, from Seleucus, the latter by that of the Lagidæ, from Ptolemæus Lagus; these they make the two legs and feet of this image: Grotius, and Junius, and Broughton, go this way. But it has been the more received opinion that it is the Roman monarchy that is here intended, because it was in the time of that monarchy, and when it was at its height, that the kingdom of Christ was set up in the world by the preaching of the everlasting gospel. The Roman kingdom was strong as iron (v. 40), witness the prevalency of that kingdom against all that contended with it for many ages. That kingdom *broke in pieces* the Grecian empire and afterwards quite destroyed the nation of the Jews. Towards the latter end of the Roman monarchy it grew very weak, and branched into ten kingdoms, which were as the toes of these feet. Some of these were weak as clay, others strong as iron, v. 42. Endeavours were used to unite and cement them for the strengthening of the empire, but in vain: *They shall not cleave one to another, v. 43.* This empire divided the government for a long time between the senate and the people, the nobles and the commons, but they did not entirely coalesce. There were civil wars between Marius and



Sylla, Cæsar and Pompey, whose parties were as iron and clay. Some refer this to the declining times of that empire, when, for the strengthening of the empire against the irruptions of the barbarous nations, the branches of the royal family intermarried; but the politics had not the desired effect, when the day of the fall of that empire came.

2. The stone cut out without hands represented the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which should be set up in the world in the time of the Roman empire, and upon the ruins of Satan's kingdom in the kingdoms of the world. This is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, for it should be neither raised nor supported by human power or policy; no visible hand should act in the setting of it up, but it should be done invisibly by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. This was the stone which the builders refused, because it was not cut out by their hands, but it has now become the head-stone of the corner.

(1.) The gospel-church is a kingdom, which Christ is the sole and sovereign monarch of, in which he rules by his word and Spirit, to which he gives protection and law, and from which he receives homage and tribute. It is a kingdom not of this world, and yet set up in it; it is the kingdom of God among men. (2.) The God of heaven was to set up this kingdom, to give authority to Christ to execute judgment, to set him as King upon his holy hill of Zion, and to bring into obedience to him a willing people. Being set up by the God of heaven, it is often in the New Testament called the kingdom of heaven, for its original is from above and its tendency is upwards. (3.) It was to be set up in the days of these kings, the kings of the fourth monarchy, of which particular notice is taken (Luke ii. 1), that Christ was born when, by the decree of the emperor of Rome, all the world was taxed, which was a plain indication that that empire had become as universal as any earthly empire ever was. When these kings are contending with each other, and in all the struggles each of the contending parties hopes to find its own account, God will do his own work and fulfil his own counsels. These kings are all enemies to Christ's kingdom, and yet it shall be set up in defiance of them. (4.) It is a kingdom that knows no decay, is in no danger of destruction, and will not admit any succession or revolution. It shall never be destroyed by any foreign force invading it, as many other kingdoms are; fire and sword cannot waste it; the combined powers of earth and hell cannot deprive either the subjects of their prince or the prince of his subjects; nor shall this kingdom be left to other people, as the kingdoms of the earth are. As Christ is a monarch that has no successor (for he himself shall reign for ever), so his kingdom is a monarchy that has no revolution. The kingdom of God was indeed taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles (Matt. xxi.

43), but still it was Christianity that ruled, the kingdom of the Messiah. The Christian church is still the same; it is fixed on a rock, much fought against, but never to be prevailed against, by the gates of hell. (5.) It is a kingdom that shall be victorious over all opposition. It shall break in pieces and consume all those kingdoms, as the stone cut out of the mountain without hands broke in pieces the image, v. 44, 45. The kingdom of Christ shall wear out all other kingdoms, shall outlive them, and flourish when they are sunk with their own weight, and so wasted that their place knows them no more. All the kingdoms that appear against the kingdom of Christ shall be broken with a rod of iron, as a potter's vessel, Ps. ii. 9. And in the kingdoms that submit to the kingdom of Christ tyranny, and idolatry, and every thing that is their reproach, shall, as far as the gospel of Christ gets ground, be broken. The day is coming when Jesus Christ shall have put down all rule, principality, and power, and have made all his enemies his footstool; and then this prophecy will have its full accomplishment, and not till then, 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25. Our Saviour seems to refer to this (Matt. xxi. 44.), when, speaking of himself as the stone set at nought by the Jewish builders, he says, On whomsoever this stone shall fall, it will grind him to powder. (6.) It shall be an everlasting kingdom. Those kingdoms of the earth that had broken in pieces all about them at length came, in their turn, to be in like manner broken; but the kingdom of Christ shall break other kingdoms in pieces and shall itself stand for ever. His throne shall be as the days of heaven, his seed, his subjects, as the stars of heaven, not only so innumerable, but so immutable. Of the increase of Christ's government and peace there shall be no end. The Lord shall reign for ever, not only to the end of time, but when time and days shall be no more, and God shall be all in all to eternity.

III. Daniel having thus interpreted the dream, to the satisfaction of Nebuchadnezzar, who gave him no interruption, so full was the interpretation that he had no question to ask, and so plain that he had no objection to make, he closes all with a solemn assertion, 1. Of the divine original of this dream: The great God (so he calls him, to express his own high thoughts of him, and to beget the like in the mind of this great king) has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter, which the gods of the magicians could not do. And thus a full confirmation was given to that great argument which Isaiah had long before urged against idolaters, and particularly the idolaters of Babylon, when he challenged the gods they worshipped to show things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods (Isa. xli. 23), and by this proved the God of Israel to be the true God,



that he *declares the end from the beginning*, Isa. xli. 10. 2. Of the undoubted certainty of the things foretold by this dream. He who makes known these things is the same that has himself designed and determined them, and will by his providence effect them; and we are sure that *his counsel shall stand*, and cannot be altered, and therefore *the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof sure*. Note, Whatever God has made known we may depend upon.

46 Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. 47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth *it is* that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret. 48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise *men* of Babylon. 49 Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel *sat* in the gate of the king.

One might have expected that when Nebuchadnezzar was contriving to make his own kingdom everlasting he would be enraged at Daniel, who foretold the fall of it and that another kingdom of another nature should be the everlasting kingdom; but, instead of resenting it as an affront, he received it as an oracle, and here we are told what the expressions were of the impressions it made upon him. 1. He was ready to look upon Daniel as a little god. Though he saw him to be a man, yet from this wonderful discovery which he had made both of his secret thoughts, in telling him the dream, and of things to come, in telling him the interpretation of it, he concluded that he had certainly a divinity lodged in him, worthy his adoration; and therefore he *fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel*, v. 46. It was the custom of the country by prostration to give honour to kings, because they have something of a divine power in them (*I have said, You are gods*); and therefore this king, who had often received such veneration from others, now paid the like to Daniel, whom he supposed to have in him a divine knowledge, which he was so struck with an admiration of that he could not contain himself, but forgot both that Daniel was a man and that himself was a king. Thus did God magnify divine revelation *and make it ho-*

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*nourable*, extorting from a proud potentate such a veneration but for one glimpse of it. He *worshipped Daniel*, and *commanded that they should offer an oblation to him*, and burn incense. Herein he cannot be justified, but may in some measure be excused, when Cornelius was thus ready to worship Peter, and John the angel, who both knew better. But, though it is not here mentioned, yet we have reason to think that Daniel refused these honours that he paid him, and said, as Peter to Cornelius, *Stand up, I myself also am a man*, or, as the angel to St. John, *See thou do it not*; for it is not said that the oblation was offered unto him, though the king commanded it, or rather *said it*, for so the word is. He said, in his haste, *Let an oblation be offered to him*. And that Daniel did say something to him which turned his eyes and thoughts another way is intimated in what follows (v. 47), *The king answered Daniel*. Note, It is possible for those to express a great honour for the ministers of God's word who yet have no true love for the word. *Herod feared John, and heard him gladly*, and yet went on in his sins, Mark vi. 20. 2. He readily acknowledged the God of Daniel to be the great God, the true God, the only living and true God. If Daniel will not suffer himself to be worshipped, he will (as Daniel, it is likely, directed him) *worship God*, by confessing (v. 47), *Of a truth your God is a God of gods*, such a God as there is no other, above all gods in dignity, over all gods in dominion. He is a *LORD of kings*, from whom they derive their power and to whom they are accountable; and he is both a discoverer and a *revealer of secrets*; what is most secret he sees and can reveal, and what he has revealed is what was secret and which none but himself could reveal, 1 Cor. ii. 10. 3. He preferred Daniel, made him a great man, v. 48. God made him a great man indeed when he took him into communion with himself, a greater man than Nebuchadnezzar could make him; but, because God had magnified him, therefore the king magnified him. Does wealth make men great? The king *gave him many great gifts*; and he had no reason to refuse them, when they all put him into so much the greater capacity of doing good to his brethren in captivity. These gifts were grateful returns for the good services he had done, and not aimed at, nor bargained for, by him, as the rewards of divination were by Balaam. Does power make a man great? He made him *ruler over the whole province of Babylon*, which no doubt had great influence upon the other provinces; he made him likewise chancellor of the university, *chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon*, to instruct those whom he had thus outdone; and, since they could not do what the king would have them do, they shall be obliged to do what Daniel would have them do. Thus it is fit



that the fool should be servant to the wise in heart. Seeing Daniel could reveal this secret (v. 47), the king thus advanced him. Note, It is the wisdom of princes to advance and employ those who receive divine revelation, and are much conversant with it, who, as Daniel here, show themselves to be well acquainted with the kingdom of heaven. Joseph, like Daniel here, was advanced in the court of the king of Egypt for his interpreting his dreams; and he called him *Zophnath-paaneah—a revealer of secrets*, as the king of Babylon here calls Daniel; so that the preambles to their patents of honour are the same—for, and in consideration of, their good services done to the crown in revealing secrets. 4. He preferred his companions for his sake, and upon his special instance and request, v. 49. Daniel himself sat in the gate of the king, as president of the council, chief-justice, or prime-minister of state, or perhaps chamberlain of the household; but he used his interest for his friends as became a good man, and procured places in the government for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Those that helped him with their prayers shall share with him in his honours, such a grateful sense had he even of that service. The preferring of them would be a great stay and help to Daniel in his place and business. And these pious Jews, being thus preferred in Babylon, had great opportunity of serving their brethren in captivity, and of doing them many good offices, which no doubt they were ready to do. Thus, sometimes, before God brings his people into trouble, he prepares it, that it may be easy to them.

## CHAP. III.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Daniel's companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in honour and power, princes of the provinces, and preferred for their relation to the God of Israel and the interest they had in him. I know not whether I should say, It were well if this honour had all the saints. No; there are many whom it would not be good for; the saint's honour is reserved for another world. But here we have those same three men as much under the king's displeasure as then they were in his favour, and yet more truly, more highly, honoured by their God than there they were honoured by their prince, both by the grace wherewith he enabled them rather to suffer than to sin and by the miraculous and glorious deliverance which he wrought for them out of their sufferings. It is a very memorable story, a glorious instance of the power and goodness of God, and a great encouragement to the constancy of his people in trying times. The apostle refers to it when he mentions, among the believing heroes, those who by faith "quenched the violence of fire," Heb. xi. 34. We have here, I. Nebuchadnezzar's erecting and dedicating a golden image, and his requiring all his subjects, of what rank or degree soever, to fall down and worship it, and the general compliance of his people with that command, ver. 1-7. II. Information given against the Jewish princes for refusing to worship this golden image, ver. 8-12. III. Their constant persisting in that refusal, notwithstanding his rage and menaces, ver. 13-18. IV. The casting of them into the fiery furnace for their refusal, ver. 19-23. V. Their miraculous preservation in the fire by the power of God, and their invitation out of the fire by the favour of the king, who was by this miracle convinced of his error in casting them in, ver. 24-27. VI. The honour which the king gave to God hereupon, and the favour he showed to those faithful worthies, ver. 28-30.

**N**EBUCHADNEZZAR the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the pro-

vince of Babylon. 2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: 6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 7 Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

We have no certainty concerning the date of this story, only that if this image, which Nebuchadnezzar dedicated, had any relation to that which he dreamed of, it is probable that it happened not long after that; some reckon it to be about the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, a year before Jehoiachin's captivity, in which Ezekiel was carried away. Observe,

I. A golden image set up to be worshipped. Babylon was full of idols already, yet nothing will serve this imperious prince but they must have one more; for those who have forsaken the one only living God, and begin to set up many gods, will find the gods they set up so unsatisfying, and their desire after them so insatiable, that they will multiply them without measure, wander after them endlessly, and never know when they have sufficient. Idolaters are fond of novelty and variety. *They choose new gods.* Those that have many will wish to have more. Nebuchadnezzar the king, that he might



exert the prerogative of his crown, to make what god he thought fit, *set up* this image, v. 1. Observe, 1. The *valuableness* of it; it was *an image of gold*, not all gold surely; rich as he was, it is probable that he could not afford that, but overlaid with gold. Note, The worshippers of false gods are not wont to mind charges in setting up images and worshipping them; they *lavish gold out of the bag* for that purpose (Isa. xlv. 6), which shames our niggardliness in the worship of the true God. 2. The vastness of it; it was *threescore cubits high and six cubits broad*. It exceeded the ordinary stature of a man fifteen times (for that is reckoned but four cubits, or six feet), as if its being monstrous would make amends for its being lifeless. But why did Nebuchadnezzar set up this image? Some suggest that it was to clear himself from the imputation of having turned a Jew, because he had lately spoken with great honour of the God of Israel and had preferred some of his worshippers. Or perhaps he set it up as an image of himself, and designed to be himself worshipped in it. Proud princes affected to have divine honours paid them; Alexander did so, pretending himself to be the son of Jupiter Olympius. He was told that in the image he had seen in his dream he was represented by the *head of gold*, which was to be succeeded by kingdoms of baser metal; but here he sets up to be himself the whole image, for he makes it all of gold. See here, (1.) How the good impressions that were then made upon him were quite lost, and quickly. He then acknowledged that the God of Israel is of a truth a *God of gods* and a *Lord of kings*; and yet now, in defiance of the express law of that God, he sets up an image to be worshipped, not only continues in his former idolatries, but contrives new ones. Note, Strong convictions often come short of a sound conversion. Many in a pang have owned the absurdity and dangerousness of sin, and yet have gone on in it. (2.) How that very dream and the interpretation of it, which then made such good impressions upon him, now had a quite contrary effect. Then it made him fall down as a humble worshipper of God; now it made him set up for a bold competitor with God. Then he thought it a great thing to be the golden head of the image, and owned himself obliged to God for it; but, his mind rising with his condition, now he thinks that too little, and, in contradiction to God himself and his oracle, he will be *all in all*.

II. A general convention of the states summoned to attend the solemnity of the dedication of this image, v. 2, 3. Messengers are despatched to all parts of the kingdom to *gather together the princes*, dukes, and lords, all the peers of the realm, with all officers civil and military, *the captains* and commanders of the forces, *the judges*,

*the treasurers* or general receivers, *the counsellors*, and *the sheriffs*, and *all the rulers of the provinces*; they must all come to the *dedication of this image* upon pain and peril of what shall fall thereon. He summons the great men, for the great honour of his idol; it is therefore mentioned to the glory of Christ that *kings shall bring presents unto him*. If he can bring them to pay homage to his golden image, he doubts not but the inferior people will follow of course. In obedience to the king's summons all the magistrates and officers of that vast kingdom leave the services of their particular countries, and come to Babylon, to the dedication of this golden image; long journeys many of them took, and expensive ones, upon a very foolish errand; but, as the idols are senseless things, such are the worshippers.

III. A proclamation made, commanding all manner of persons present before the image, upon the signal given, to fall down prostrate, and worship the image, under the style and title of *The golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up*. A herald proclaims this aloud throughout this vast assembly of grandees, with their numerous train of servants and attendants, and a great crowd of people, no doubt, that were not sent for; let them all take notice, 1. That the king does strictly charge and command all manner of persons to fall down and *worship the golden image*; whatever other gods they worship at other times, now they must worship this. 2. That they must all do this just at the same time, in token of their communion with each other in this idolatrous service, and that, in order hereunto, notice shall be given by a concert of music, which would likewise serve to adorn the solemnity and to sweeten and soften the minds of those that were loth to yield and bring them to comply with the king's command. This mirth and gaiety in the worship would be very agreeable to carnal sensual minds, that are strangers to that spiritual worship which is due to God who is a spirit.

IV. The general compliance of the assembly with this command, v. 7. They heard the sound of the musical instruments, both wind-instruments and hand-instruments, *the cornet* and *flute*, with the *harp*, *sackbut*, *psaltery*, and *dulcimer*, the melody of which they thought was ravishing (and fit enough it was to excite such a devotion as they were then to pay), and immediately they all, as one man, as soldiers that are wont to be exercised by beat of drum, *all the people, nations, and languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image*. And no marvel when it was proclaimed, That whosoever would not *worship this golden image* should be immediately thrown *into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*, ready prepared for that purpose, v. 6. Here were the charms of music to allure them into a compliance and the terrors of the fiery furnace to frighten



them into a compliance. Thus beset with temptation, they all yielded. Note, That way that sense directs the most will go; there is nothing so bad which the careless world will not be drawn to by a concert of music, or driven to by a fiery furnace. And by such methods as these false worship has been set up and maintained.

8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. 9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. 10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: 11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, *that* he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in *his* rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, *Is it* true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; *well*: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who *is* that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that

we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

It was strange that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would be present at this assembly, when, it is likely, they knew for what intent it was called together. Daniel, we may suppose, was absent, either his business calling him away or having leave from the king to withdraw, unless we suppose that he stood so high in the king's favour that none durst complain of him for his non-compliance. But why did not his companions keep out of the way? Surely because they would obey the king's orders as far as they could, and would be ready to bear a public testimony against this gross idolatry. They did not think it enough not to bow down to the image, but, being in office, thought themselves obliged to stand up against it, though it was the image which the king their master set up, and would be a golden image to those that worshipped it. Now,

1. Information is brought to the king by *certain Chaldeans* against these three gentlemen that they did not obey the king's edict, *v. 8*. Perhaps these Chaldeans that accused them were some of those *magicians or astrologers* that were particularly called *Chaldeans* (*ch. ii. 2, 4*) who bore a grudge to Daniel's companions for his sake, because he had eclipsed them, and so had these his companions. They by their prayers had obtained the mercy which saved the lives of these Chaldeans, and, behold, how they requite them evil for good! for their love they are their adversaries. Thus Jeremiah *stood before God, to speak good for those who afterwards dug a pit for his life*, Jer. xviii. 20. We must not think it strange if we meet with such ungrateful men. Or perhaps they were such of the Chaldeans as expected the places to which they were advanced, and envied them their preferments; *and who can stand before envy?* They appeal to the king himself concerning the edict, with all due respect to his majesty, and the usual compliment, *O king! live for ever* (as if they aimed at nothing but his honour, and to serve his interest, when really they were putting him upon that which would endanger the ruin of him and his kingdom); they beg leave, 1. To put him in mind of the law he had lately made, That all manner of persons, without exception of nation or language, should *fall down and worship this golden image*; they put him in mind also of the penalty which by the law was to be inflicted upon recusants, that they were to be *cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace*, *v. 10, 11*. It cannot be denied but that this was the law; whether a righteous law or no ought to be considered. 2. To inform him that these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, had not conformed to this edict, *v. 12*. It is probable that Nebuchad-

nezzar had no particular design to ensnare him in making the law, for then he would himself have had his eye upon them, and would not have needed this information; but their enemies, that sought an occasion against them, laid hold on this, and were forward to accuse them. To aggravate the matter, and incense the king the more against them, (1.) They put him in mind of the dignity to which the criminals had been preferred. Though they were Jews, foreigners, captives, men of a despised nation and religion, yet the king had *set them over the affairs of the province of Babylon*. It was therefore very ungrateful, and an insufferable piece of insolence, for them to disobey the king's command, when they had shared so much of the king's favour. And, besides, the high station they were in would make their refusal the more scandalous; it would be a bad example, and have a bad influence upon others; and therefore it was necessary that it should be severely animadverted upon. Thus princes that are incensed enough against innocent people commonly have but too many about them who do all they can to make them worse. (2.) They suggest that it was done maliciously, contumaciously, and in contempt of him and his authority: They have *set no regard upon thee*; for they *serve not the gods* which thou servest, and which thou requirest them to serve, nor *worship the golden image which thou hast set up*."

II. These three pious Jews are immediately brought before the king, and arraigned and examined upon this information. Nebuchadnezzar fell into a great passion, and *in his rage and fury commanded* them to be seized, v. 13. How little was it the honour of this mighty prince that he had rule over so many nations when at the same time he had *no rule over his own spirit*, that there were so many who were subjects and captives to him when he was himself a perfect slave to his own brutish passions and led captive by them! How unfit was he to rule reasonable men who could not himself be ruled by reason! It needed not be a surprise to him to hear that these three men did not now serve his gods, for he knew very well they never had served them, and that their religion, which they had always adhered to, forbade them to do it. Nor had he any reason to think that they designed any contempt of his authority, for they had in all instances shown themselves respectful and dutiful to him as their prince. But it was especially unreasonable at this time, when he was in the midst of his devotions, dedicating his golden image, to be in such a rage and fury, and so much to discompose himself. The *discretion of a man*, one would think, should at least have *deferred this anger*. True devotion calms the spirit, quiets and meekens it; but superstition, and a devotion to false gods, inflame men's passions, inspire them with rage, and fury, and turn them into brutes.

*The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion*; so was the wrath of this king; and yet, when he was in such a heat, these three men were *brought before him*, and appeared with an undaunted courage, an unshaken constancy.

III. The case is laid before them in short, and it is put to them whether they will comply or no. 1. The king asked them whether it was true that they had not worshipped the golden image when others did, v. 14. "*Is it of purpose?*" so some read it. "Was it designedly and deliberately done, or was it only through inadvertency, that you have not served my gods? What! you that I have nourished and brought up, that have been educated and maintained at my charge, that I have been so kind to and done so much for, you that have been in such reputation for wisdom, and therefore should better have known your duty to your prince; what! do not you serve my gods nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" Note, The faithfulness of God's servants to him has often been the wonder of their enemies and persecutors, who think it strange that they run not with them to the same excess of riot. 2. He was willing to admit them to a new trial; if they did on purpose not to do it before, yet, it may be, upon second thoughts, they will change their minds; it is therefore repeated to them upon what terms they now stand, v. 15. (1.) The king is willing that music shall play again, only for their sakes, to soften them into a compliance; and if they will not, like the deaf adder, stop their ears, but will hearken to the voice of the charmers and will *worship the golden image*, well and good; their former omission shall be pardoned. But, (2.) The king is resolved, if they persist in their refusal, that they shall immediately be *cast into the fiery furnace*, and shall not have so much as an hour's reprieve. Thus does the matter lie in a little compass—*Turn, or burn*; and, because he knew they buoyed themselves up in their refusal with a confidence in their God, he insolently set him at defiance: "*And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" Let him, if he can." Now he forgot what he himself once owned, that their God was a *God of gods* and a *Lord of kings*, ch. ii. 47. Proud men are still ready to say, as Pharaoh, *Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?* or, as Nebuchadnezzar, *Who is the Lord, that I should fear his power?*

IV. They give in their answer, which they all agree in, that they still adhere to their resolution not to worship the golden image, v. 16—18. We have here such an instance of fortitude and magnanimity as is scarcely to be paralleled. We call these the *three children* (and they were indeed young men), but we should rather call them the three champions, the *first three* of the *worthies* of God's kingdom among men. They did not break out into any intemperate heat or pas-



sion against those that did worship the golden image, did not insult or affront them; nor did they rashly thrust themselves upon the trial, or go out of their way to court martyrdom; but, when they were duly called to the fiery trial, they acquitted themselves bravely, with a conduct and courage that became sufferers for so good a cause. The king was not so daringly bad in making this idol, but they were as daringly good in witnessing against it. They keep their temper admirably well, do not call the king a tyrant or an idolater (the cause of God needs not the wrath of man), but, with an exemplary calmness and sedateness of mind, they deliberately give in their answer, which they resolve to abide by. Observe,

1. Their gracious and generous contempt of death, and the noble negligence with which they look upon the dilemma that they are put to: *O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.* They do not in sullenness deny him an answer, nor stand mute; but they tell him that they are in no care about it. *There needs not an answer* (so some read it); they are resolved not to comply, and the king is resolved they shall die if they do not; the matter therefore is determined, and why should it be disputed? But it is better read, *"We want not an answer for thee, nor have it to seek, but come prepared."* (1.) They needed no time to deliberate concerning the matter of their answer; for they did not in the least hesitate whether they should comply or no. It was a matter of life and death, and one would think they might have considered awhile before they had resolved; life is desirable, and death is dreadful. But when the sin and duty that were in the case were immediately determined by the letter of the second commandment, and no room was left to question what was right, the life and death that were in the case were not to be considered. Note, Those that would avoid sin must not parley with temptation. When that which we are allured or affrighted to is manifestly evil the motion is rather to be rejected with indignation and abhorrence than reasoned with; stand not to pause about it, but say, as Christ has taught us, *Get thee behind me, Satan.* (2.) They needed no time to contrive how they should word it. While they were advocates for God, and were called out to witness in his cause, they doubted not but it should be *given them in that same hour what they should speak*, Matt. x. 19. They were not contriving an evasive answer, when a direct answer was expected from them; no, nor would they seem to court the king not to insist upon it. Here is nothing in their answer that looks like compliment; they begin not, as their accusers did, with, *O king! live for ever*, no artful insinuation, *ad captandam benevolentiam—to put him into a good humour*, but every thing that is plain and downright: *O Nebuchadnezzar! we are not*

*careful to answer thee.* Note, Those that make their duty their main care need not be careful concerning the event.

2. Their believing confidence in God and their dependence upon him, v. 17. It was this that enabled them to look with so much contempt upon death, death in pomp, death in all its terrors: they trusted in the living God, and by that faith chose rather to suffer than to sin; they therefore *feared not the wrath of the king*, but endured, because by faith they had an eye to him that is *invisible* (Heb. xi. 25, 27): *"If it be so, if we are brought to this strait, if we must be thrown into the fiery furnace unless we serve thy gods, know then,"* (1.) *"That though we worship not thy gods yet we are not atheists; there is a God whom we can call ours, to whom we faithfully adhere."* (2.) *"That we serve this God; we have devoted ourselves to his honour; we employ ourselves in his work, and depend upon him to protect us, provide for us, and reward us."* (3.) *"That we are well assured that this God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; whether he will or no, we are sure that he can either prevent our being cast into the furnace or rescue us out of it."* Note, The faithful servants of God will find him a Master able to bear them out in his service, and to control and overrule all the powers that are armed against them. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst.* (4.) *"That we have reason to hope he will deliver us,"* partly because, in such a vast appearance of idolaters, it would be very much for the honour of his great name to deliver them, and partly because Nebuchadnezzar had defied him to do it—*Who is that God that shall deliver you?* God sometimes appears wonderfully for the silencing of the blasphemies of the enemy, as well as for the answering of the prayers of his people, Ps. lxxiv. 18—22; Deut. xxxii. 27. *"But, if he do not deliver us from the fiery furnace, he will deliver us out of thy hand."* Nebuchadnezzar can but torment and kill the body, and, after that, there is no more that he can do; then they are got out of his reach, delivered out of his hand. Note, Good thoughts of God, and a full assurance that he is with us while we are with him, will help very much to carry us through sufferings; and, if he be for us, we need not fear what man can do unto us; let him do his worst. God will deliver us either from death or in death.

3. Their firm resolution to adhere to their principles, whatever might be the consequence (v. 18): *"But, if not, though God should not think fit to deliver us from the fiery furnace (which yet we know he can do), if he should suffer us to fall into thy hand, and fall by thy hand, yet be it known unto thee, O king! we will not serve these gods, though they are thy gods, nor worship this golden image, though thou thyself hast set it up."* They are neither ashamed nor afraid to own their religion, and tell the king to his face



that they do not fear him, they will not yield to him; had they consulted with flesh and blood, much might have been said to bring them to a compliance, especially when there was no other way of avoiding death, *so great a death*. (1.) They were not required to abjure their own God, or to renounce his worship, no, nor by any verbal profession or declaration to own this golden image to be a god, but only to bow down before it, which they might do with a secret reserve of their hearts for the God of Israel, inwardly detesting this idolatry, as Naaman bowed in the house of Rimmon. (2.) They were not to fall into a course of idolatry; it was but one single act that was required of them, which would be done in a minute, and the danger was over, and they might afterwards declare their sorrow for it. (3.) The king that commanded it had an absolute power; they were under it, not only as subjects, but as captives; and, if they did it, it was purely by coercion and duress, which would serve to excuse them. (4.) He had been their benefactor, had educated and preferred them, and in gratitude to him they ought to go as far as they could, though it were to strain a point, a point of conscience. (5.) They were now driven into a strange country, and to those that were so driven out it was, in effect, said, *Go, and serve other gods*, 1 Sam. xxvi. 19. It was taken for granted that in their disposition they would *serve other gods*, and it was made a part of the judgment, Deut. iv. 28. They might be excused if they should go down the stream, when it is so strong. (6.) Did not their kings, and their princes, and their fathers, yea, and their priests too, set up idols even in God's temple, and worship them there, and not only bow down to them, but erect altars, burn incense, and offer sacrifices, even their own children, to them? Did not all the ten tribes, for many ages, worship gods of gold at Dan and Bethel? And shall they be more precise than their fathers? *Communis error facit jus—What all do must be right*. (7.) If they should comply, they would save their lives and keep their places, and so be in a capacity to do a great deal of service to their brethren in Babylon, and to do it long; for they were young men, and rising men. But there is enough in that one word of God wherewith to answer and silence these and many more such like carnal reasonings: *Thou shalt not bow down thyself to any images, nor worship them*. They know they must obey God rather than man; they must rather suffer than sin, and must not do evil that good may come. And therefore none of these things move them; they are resolved rather to die in their integrity than live in their iniquity. While their brethren, who yet remained in their own land, were worshipping images by choice, they in Babylon would not be brought to it by constraint, but, as if they were good by *antiperistasis*, were most zealous against idolatry in

an idolatrous country. And truly, all things considered, the saving of them from this sinful compliance was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace as the saving of them out of the fiery furnace was in the kingdom of nature. These were those who formerly resolved not to defile themselves with the *king's meat*, and now they as bravely resolve not to defile themselves with his gods. Note, A steadfast self-denying adherence to God and duty in less instances will qualify and prepare us for the like in greater. And in this we must be resolute, never, under any pretence whatsoever, to worship images, or to say "A confederacy" with those that do so.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: *therefore* he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he commanded the most mighty men that *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, *and* to cast *them* into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, *and* spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, *and* spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come *hither*. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire. 27 And the



princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

In these verses we have,

I. The casting of these three faithful servants of God into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar had himself known and owned so much of the true God that, one would have thought, though his pride and vanity induced him to make this golden image, and set it up to be worshipped, yet what these young men now said (whom he had formerly found to be wiser than all his wise men) would revive his convictions, and at least engage him to excuse them; but it proved quite otherwise. 1. Instead of being convinced by what they said, he was exasperated, and made more outrageous, v. 19. It made him *full of fury*, and the *form of his visage was changed* against these men. Note, Brutish passions the more they are indulged the more violent they grow, and even change the countenance, to the great reproach of the wisdom and reason of a man. Nebuchadnezzar, in this heat, exchanged the awful majesty of a prince upon his throne, or a judge upon the bench, for the frightful fury of a *wild bull in a net*. Would men in a passion but view their faces in a glass, they would blush at their own folly and turn all their displeasure against themselves. 2. Instead of mitigating their punishment, in consideration of their quality and the posts of honour they were in, he ordered it to be heightened, that they should *heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated* for other malefactors, that is, that they should put seven times more fuel to it, which, though it would not make their death more grievous, but rather dispatch them the sooner, was designed to signify that the king looked upon their crime as seven times more heinous than the crimes of others, and so made their death more ignominious. But God brought glory to himself out of this foolish instance of the tyrant's rage; for, though it would not have made their death the more grievous, yet it did make their deliverance much the more illustrious. 3. He ordered them to be bound in their clothes, and cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace, which was done accordingly, v. 20, 21. They were bound, that they might not struggle, or make any resistance, were bound in their clothes, for haste, or that they might be consumed the more slowly and gradually. But God's providence ordered it for the increase of the miracle, in that their clothes were not so much as singed. They were bound in their *coats* or mantles, their *hosen* or breeches, and their *hats* or turbans, as if, in detestation of their crime, they would have

their clothes to be burnt with them. What a terrible death was this—to be *cast bound into the midst of a burning fiery furnace!* v. 23. It makes one's flesh tremble to think of it, and horror to take hold on one. It is amazing that the tyrant was so hard-hearted as to inflict such a punishment, and that the confessors were so stout-hearted as to submit to it rather than sin against God. But what is this to the *second death*, to that furnace into which the tares shall be cast in bundles, to that lake which burns eternally with fire and brimstone? Let Nebuchadnezzar heat his furnace as hot as he can, a few minutes will finish the torment of those who are cast into it; but hell-fire tortures and does not kill. The pain of damned sinners is more exquisite, and *the smoke of their torment ascends for ever and ever*, and *those have no rest*, no intermission, no cessation of their pains, *who have worshipped the beast and his image* (Rev. xiv. 10, 11), whereas their pain would be soon over that were cast into this furnace for not worshipping this Babylonian beast and his image. 4. It was a remarkable providence that the men, the *mighty men*, that bound them, and threw them into the furnace, were themselves consumed or suffocated by the flame, v. 22. The *king's commandment was urgent*, that they should dispatch them quickly, and be sure to do it effectually; and therefore they resolved to go to the very mouth of the furnace, that they might throw them *into the midst* of it, but they were in such haste that they would not take time to arm themselves accordingly. The apocryphal additions to Daniel say that the flame ascended forty-nine cubits above the mouth of the furnace. Probably God ordered it so that the wind blew it directly upon them with such violence that it smothered them. God did thus immediately plead the cause of his injured servants, and take vengeance for them on their persecutors, whom he punished, not only in the very act of their sin, but by it. But these men were only the instruments of cruelty; he that bade them do it had the greater sin; yet they suffered justly for executing an unjust decree, and it is very probable that they did it with pleasure and were glad to be so employed. Nebuchadnezzar himself was reserved for a further reckoning. There is a day coming when proud tyrants will be punished, not only for the cruelties they have been guilty of, but for employing those about them in their cruelties, and so exposing them to the judgments of God.

II. The deliverance of these three faithful servants of God out of the furnace. When they were cast bound into the midst of that devouring fire we might well conclude that we should hear no more of them, that their very bones would be calcined; but, to our amazement, we here find that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are yet alive.

1. Nebuchadnezzar finds them walking in the fire. *He was astonished, and rose up in*

*haste, v. 24* Perhaps the slaying of the men that executed his sentence was that which astonished him, as well it might, for he had reason to think his own turn would be next; or it was some unaccountable impression upon his own mind that astonished him, and made him rise up in haste, and go to the furnace, to see what had become of those he had cast into it. Note, God can strike those with astonishment whose hearts are most hardened both against him and against his people. He that made the soul can make his sword to approach to it, even to that of the greatest tyrant. In his astonishment he calls his counsellors about him, and appeals to them. *Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?* It seems, it was done by order, not only of the king, but of the council. They durst not but concur with him, which he forced them to do, that they might share with him in the guilt and odium? "*True, O king!*" say they; "we did order such an execution to be done, and it was done." "But now," says the king, "I have been looking into the furnace, and I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire," *v. 25.* (1.) They were loosed from their bonds. The fire that did not so much as singe their clothes burnt the cords wherewith they were bound, and set them at liberty; thus God's people have their hearts enlarged, through the grace of God, by those very troubles with which their enemies designed to straiten and hamper them. (2.) They had no hurt, made no complaint, felt no pain or uneasiness in the least; the flame did not scorch them; the smoke did not stifle them; they were alive and as well as ever in the midst of the flames. See how the God of nature can, when he pleases, control the powers of nature, to make them serve his purposes. Now was fulfilled in the letter that gracious promise (Isa. xliii. 2), *When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.* By faith they quench the violence of the fire, quench the fiery darts of the wicked. (3.) They walked in the midst of the fire. The furnace was large, so that they had room to walk; they were unhurt, so that they were able to walk; their minds were easy, so that they were disposed to walk, as in a paradise or garden of pleasure. *Can a man walk upon hot coals and his feet not be burnt?* Prov. vi. 28. Yes, they did it with as much pleasure as the king of Tyrus walked up and down in the midst of his stones of fire, his precious stones that sparkled as fire, Ezek. xxviii. 14. They were not striving to get out, finding themselves unhurt; but, leaving it to that God who preserved them in the fire to bring them out of it, they walked up and down in the midst of it unconcerned. One of the apocryphal writings relates at large the prayer which Azariah, one of the three, prayed in the fire (wherein he laments the calamities and iniquities of Israel, and entreats God's

favour to his people), and the song of praise which they all three sang in the midst of the flames, in both which there are remarkable strains of devotion; but we have reason to think, with Grotius, that they were composed by some Jew of a later age, not as what were used, but only as what might have been used, on this occasion, and therefore we justly reject them as no part of holy writ. (4.) There was a fourth seen with them in the fire, whose form, in Nebuchadnezzar's judgment, was like the Son of God; he appeared as a divine person, a messenger from heaven, not as a servant, but as a son. *Like an angel* (so some); and angels are called sons of God, Job xxxviii. 7. In the apocryphal narrative of this story it is said, *The angel of the Lord came down into the furnace*; and Nebuchadnezzar here says (*v. 28*), *God sent his angel and delivered them*; and it was an angel that shut the lions' mouths when Daniel was in the den, *ch. vi. 22*. But some think it was the eternal Son of God, the angel of the covenant, and not a created angel. He appeared often in our nature before he assumed it in his incarnation, and never more seasonably, nor to give a more proper indication and presage of his great errand into the world in the fulness of time, than now, when, to deliver his chosen out of the fire, he came and walked with them in the fire. Note, Those that suffer for Christ have his gracious presence with them in their sufferings, even in the fiery furnace, even in the valley of the shadow of death, and therefore even there they need *fear no evil*. Hereby Christ showed that what is done against his people he takes as done against himself; whoever throws them into the furnace does, in effect, throw him in. *I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest*, Isa. lxiii. 9.

2. Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the furnace (*v. 26*): *He comes near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace*, and bids them come forth and come hither. *Come forth, come* (so some read it); he speaks with a great deal of tenderness and concern, and stands ready to lend them his hand and help them out. He is convinced by their miraculous preservation that he did evil in casting them into the furnace; and therefore he does not thrust them out privily; *no verily, but he will come himself and fetch them out*, Acts xvi. 37. Observe the respectful title that he gives them. When he was in the heat of his fury and rage against them it is probable that he called them rebels, and traitors, and all the ill names he could invent; but now he owns them for the servants of the most high God, a God who now appears able to deliver them out of his hand. Note, Sooner or later, God will convince the proudest of men that he is the most high God, and above them, and too hard for them, even in those things wherein they deal proudly and presumptuously, Exod. xviii. 11. He will likewise let them know



who are his servants, and that he owns them and will stand by them. Elijah prayed (1 Kings xviii. 36), *Let it be known that thou art God and that I am thy servant.* Nebuchadnezzar now embraces those whom he had abandoned, and is very officious about them, now that he perceives them to be the favourites of Heaven. Note, What persecutors have done against God's servants, when God opens their eyes, they must as far as they can undo again. How the fourth, whose form was like the Son of God, withdrew, and whether he vanished away or visibly ascended, we are not told, but of the other three we are informed, (1.) That they came forth out of the midst of the fire, as Abraham their father out of Ur (that is, the fire) of the Chaldees, into which, says this tradition of the Jews, he was cast, for refusing to worship idols, and out of which he was delivered, as those his three children were. When they had their discharge they did not tempt God by staying in any longer, but came forth as brands out of the burning. (2.) That it was made to appear, to the full satisfaction of all the amazed spectators, that they had not received the least damage by the fire v. 27. All the great men came together to view them, and found that there was not so much as a hair of their head singed. Here that was true in the letter which our Saviour spoke figuratively, for an assurance to his suffering servants that they should sustain no real damage (Luke xxi. 18), *There shall not a hair of your head perish.* Their cloths did not so much as change colour, nor smell of fire, much less were their bodies in the least scorched or blistered; no, the fire had no power on them. The Chaldeans worshipped the fire, as a sort of image of the sun, so that, in restraining the fire now, God put contempt, not only upon their king, but upon their God too, and showed that his voice divides the flames of fire as well as the floods of water (Ps. xxix. 7), when he pleases to make a way for his people through the midst of it. It is our God only that is the consuming fire (Heb. xii. 29); other fire, if he but speak the word, shall not consume.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any God, except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in

pieces and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon.

The strict observations that were made, *super visum corporis—on inspecting their bodies*, by the princes and governors, and all the great men who were present upon this public occasion, and who could not be supposed partial in favour of the confessors, contributed much to the clearing of this miracle and the magnifying of the power and grace of God in it. *That indeed a notable miracle has been done is manifest, and we cannot deny it*, Acts iv. 16. Let us now see what effect it had upon Nebuchadnezzar.

1. He gives glory to the God of Israel as a God able and ready to protect his worshippers (v. 28): *"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Let him have the honour both of the faithful allegiance which his subjects bear to him and the powerful protection he grants to them, neither of which can be paralleled by any other nation and their gods."* The king does himself acknowledge and adore him, and thinks it is fit that he should be acknowledged and adored by all. *Blessed be the God of Shadrach.* Note, God can extort confessions of his blessedness even from those that have been ready to curse him to his face. 1. He gives him the glory of his power, that he was able to protect his worshippers against the most mighty and malignant enemies: *There is no other God that can deliver after this sort* (v. 29), no, not this golden image which he had set up. For this reason there was no other god that obliged his worshippers to cleave to him only, and to suffer death rather than worship any other, as the God of Israel did, for they could not engage to bear them out in so doing, as he could. If God can work such deliverance as no other can, he may demand such obedience as no other may. 2. He gives him the glory of his goodness, that he was ready to do it (v. 28): *He has sent his angel and delivered his servants.* Bel could not save his worshippers from being burnt at the mouth of the furnace, but the God of Israel saved his from being burnt when they were cast into the midst of the furnace because they refused to worship any other god. By this Nebuchadnezzar was plainly given to understand that all the great success which he had had, and should yet have, against the people of Israel, which he gloried in, as if he had therein overpowered the God of Israel, was owing purely to their sin: if the body of that nation had faithfully adhered to their own God and the worship of him only, as these three men did, they would all have been delivered out of his hand as these three men



were. And this was a necessary instruction for him at this time.

II. He applauds the constancy of these three men in their religion, and describes it to their honour, v. 28. Though he is not himself persuaded to own their God for his and to worship him, because, if he do so, he knows he must worship him only and renounce all others, and he calls him *the God of Shadrach*, not *my God*, yet he commends them for cleaving to him, and *not serving nor worshipping any other God but their own*. Note, There are many who are not religious themselves, and yet will own that those are clearly in the right that are religious and are steadfast in their religion. Though they are not themselves persuaded to close with it, they will commend those who, having closed with it, cleave to it. If men have given up their names to that God who will alone be served, let them keep to their principles, and serve him only, whatever it cost them. Such a constancy in the true religion will turn to men's praise, even among those that are without, when unsteadiness, treachery, and double dealing, are what all men will cry shame on. He commends them that they did this, 1. With a generous contempt of their lives, which they valued not, in comparison with the favour of God and the testimony of a good conscience. They *yielded their own bodies* to be cast into the fiery furnace rather than they would not only not forsake their God, but not affront him, by once paying that homage to any other which is due to him alone. Note, Those shall have their praise, if not of men, yet of God, who prefer their souls before their bodies, and will rather lose their lives than forsake their God. Those know not the worth and value of religion who do not think it worth suffering for. 2. They did it with a glorious contradiction to their prince: They *changed the king's word*, that is, they were contrary to it, and thereby put contempt upon both his precepts and threatenings, and made him repent and revoke both. Note, Even kings themselves must own that, when their commands are contrary to the commands of God, he is to be obeyed and not they. (3.) They did it with a gracious confidence in their God. They *trusted in him* that he would stand by them in what they did, that he would either bring them out of the fiery furnace back to their place on earth or lead them through the fiery furnace forward to their place in heaven; and in this confidence they became fearless of the king's wrath and regardless of their own lives. Note, A steadfast faith in God will produce a steadfast faithfulness to God. Now this honourable testimony, thus publicly borne by the king himself to these servants of God, we may well think, would have a good influence upon the rest of the Jews that were, or should be, captives in Babylon. Their

neighbours could not with any confidence urge them to do that, nor could they for shame do that, which their brethren were so highly applauded by the king himself for not doing. Nay, and what God did for these his servants would help not only to keep the Jews close to their religion while they were in captivity, but to cure them of their inclination to idolatry, for which end they were sent into captivity; and, when it had had that blessed effect upon them, they might be assured that God would deliver them out of that furnace, as now he delivered their brethren out of this.

III. He issues a royal edict, strictly forbidding any to speak evil of the God of Israel, v. 29. We have reason to think that both the sins and the troubles of Israel had given great occasion, though no just occasion, to the Chaldeans to blaspheme the God of Israel, and it is likely, Nebuchadnezzar himself had encouraged it; but now, though he is no true convert, nor is wrought upon to worship him, yet he resolves never to speak ill of him again, nor to suffer others to do so: "*Whoever shall speak any thing amiss, any error* (so some), or rather any reproach or blasphemy, whoever shall speak with contempt of *the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*, they shall be counted the worst of malefactors, and dealt with accordingly, they shall be *cut in pieces*, as Agag was by the sword of Samuel, and their houses shall be demolished and made a *dunghill*." The miracle now wrought by the power of this God in defence of his worshippers, publicly in the sight of the thousands of Babylon, was a sufficient justification of this edict. And it would contribute much to the ease of the Jews in their captivity to be by this law screened from the fiery darts of reproach and blasphemy, with which otherwise they would have been continually annoyed. Note, It is a great mercy to the church, and a good point gained, when its enemies, though they have not their hearts turned, yet have their mouths stopped and their tongues tied. If a heathen prince laid such a restraint upon the proud lips of blasphemers, much more should Christian princes do it; nay, in this thing, one would think that men should be law to themselves, and that those who have so little love to God that they care not to speak well of him, yet could never find in their hearts, for we are sure they could never find cause, to *speak any thing amiss* of him.

IV. He not only reverses the attainder of these three men, but restores them to their places in the government (*makes them to prosper*, so the word is), and prefers them to greater and more advantageous trusts than they had been in before: He *promoted them in the province* of Babylon, which was much to their honour and the comfort of their brethren in captivity there. Note, It is the wisdom of princes to prefer and em-



ploy men of stedfastness in religion; for those are most likely to be faithful to them who are faithful to God, and it is likely to be well with them when God's favourites are made theirs.

## CHAP. IV.

The penman of this chapter is Nebuchadnezzar himself: the story here recorded concerning him is given us in his own words, as he himself drew it up and published it; but Daniel, a prophet, by inspiration, inserts it in his history, and so it has become a part of sacred writ and a very memorable part. Nebuchadnezzar was as daring a rival with God Almighty for the sovereignty as perhaps any mortal man ever was; but here he fairly owns himself conquered, and gives it under his hand that the God of Israel is above him. Here is, 1. The preface to his narrative, wherein he acknowledges God's dominion over him, ver. 1—3. 2. The narrative itself, wherein he relates, 1. His dream, which puzzled the magicians, ver. 1—19. 2. The interpretation of his dream by Daniel, who showed him that it was a prognostication of his own fall, advising him therefore to repent and reform, ver. 19—27. 3. The accomplishment of it in his running stark mad for seven years, and then recovering the use of his reason again, ver. 28—35. 4. The conclusion of the narrative, with a humble acknowledgment and adoration of God as Lord of all, ver. 37. This was extorted from him by the overruling power of that God who has all men's hearts in his hand, and stands upon record a lasting proof of God's supremacy, a monument of his glory, a trophy of his victory, and a warning to all not to think of prospering while they lift up or harden their hearts against God.

**N**EBUCHADNEZZAR the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 2 I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. 3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

Here is, I. Something of form, which was usual in writs, proclamations, or circular letters, issued by the king, v. 1. The royal style which Nebuchadnezzar makes use of has nothing in it of pomp or fancy, but is plain, short, and unaffected—*Nebuchadnezzar the king*. If at other times he made use of great swelling words of vanity in his title, now he laid them all aside; for he was old, he had lately recovered from a distraction which had humbled and mortified him, and was now in the actual contemplation of God's greatness and sovereignty. The declaration is directed not only to his own subjects, but to all to whom this present writing shall come—to all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth. He is not only willing that they should all hear of it, though it carry the account of his own infamy (which perhaps none durst have published if he had not done it himself, and therefore Daniel published the original paper), but he strictly charges and commands all manner of persons to take notice of it; for all are concerned, and it may be profitable to all. He salutes those to whom he writes, in the usual form, *Peace be multiplied unto you*. Note, It becomes kings with their commands to disperse their good wishes, and, as fathers of their country, to bless their subjects. So the common form with

us. We send greeting, *Omnibus quibus hæ præsentēs literæ perçenerint, salutem*—To all to whom these presents shall come, health; and sometimes *Salutem sempiternam*—Health and salvation everlasting.

## II. Something of substance and matter.

He writes this, 1. To acquaint others with the providences of God that had related to him (v. 2): *I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God* (so he calls the true God) *has wrought towards me*. He thought it seemly (so the word is), that it was his duty, and did well become him, that it was a debt he owed to God and the world, now that he had recovered from his distraction, to relate to distant places, and record for future ages, how justly God had humbled him and how graciously he had at length restored him. All the nations, no doubt, had heard what befel Nebuchadnezzar, and rang of it; but he thought it fit that they should have a distinct account of it from himself, that they might know the hand of God in it, and what impressions were made upon his own spirit by it, and might speak of it not as a matter of news, but as a matter of religion. The events concerning him were not only wonders to be admired, but signs to be instructed by, signifying to the world that Jehovah is greater than all gods. Note, We ought to show to others God's dealings with us, both the rebukes we have been under and the favours we have received; and though the account hereof may reflect disgrace upon ourselves, as this did upon Nebuchadnezzar, yet we must not conceal it, as long as it may redound to the glory of God. Many will be forward to tell what God has done for their souls, because that turns to their own praise, who care not for telling what God has done against them, and how they deserved it; whereas we ought to give glory to God, not only by praising him for his mercies, but by confessing our sins, accepting the punishment of our iniquity, and in both taking shame to ourselves, as this mighty monarch here does. 2. To show how much he was himself affected with them and convinced by them, v. 3. We should always speak of the word and works of God with concern and seriousness and show ourselves affected with those great things of God which we desire others should take notice of. (1.) He admires God's doings. He speaks of them as one amazed: *How great are his signs, and how mighty are his wonders!* Nebuchadnezzar was now old, had reigned above forty years, and had seen as much of the world and the revolutions of it as most men ever did; and yet never till now, when himself was nearly touched, was he brought to admire surprising events as God's signs and his wonders. Now, *How great, how mighty*, are they! Note. The more we see events to be the Lord's doing, and see in them the product of a divine

power and the conduct of a divine wisdom, the more marvellous they will appear in our eyes, Ps. cxviii. 23; lxvi. 2. (2.) He thence infers God's dominion. This is that which he is at length brought to subscribe to: *His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*; and not like his own kingdom, which he saw, and long since foresaw, in a dream, hastening towards a period. He now owns that there is a God that governs the world and has a universal, incontestable, absolute dominion in and over all the affairs of the children of men. And it is the glory of this kingdom that it is everlasting. Other reigns are confined to one generation, and other dynasties to a few generations, but God's *dominion is from generation to generation*. It should seem, Nebuchadnezzar here refers to what Daniel had foretold of a kingdom which the God of heaven would set up, that should *never be destroyed* (ch. ii. 44), which, though meant of the kingdom of the Messiah, he understood of the providential kingdom. Thus we may make a profitable practical use and application of those prophetic scriptures which yet we do not fully, and perhaps not rightly, comprehend the meaning of.

4 I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise *men* of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. 8 But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, according to the name of my God, and in whom *is* the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, *saying*, 9 O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods *is* in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. 10 Thus *were* the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof *was* great. 11 The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight

thereof to the end of all the earth: 12 The leaves thereof *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. 13 I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven; 14 He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: 15 Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and *let* his portion *be* with the beasts in the grass of the earth: 16 Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. 17 This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. 18 This dream I king Nebuchadnezzar have seen. Now thou, O Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation thereof, forasmuch as all the wise *men* of my kingdom are not able to make known unto me the interpretation: but thou *art* able; for the spirit of the holy gods *is* in thee.

Nebuchadnezzar, before he relates the judgments of God that had been wrought upon him for his pride, gives an account of the fair warning he had of them before they came, a due regard to which might have prevented them. But he was *told of them*, and of the issue of them, *before they came to pass, that, when they did come to pass*, by comparing them with the prediction of them, he might see, and say, that they were the Lord's doing, and might be brought to believe that there is a divine revelation in the world, as well as a divine Providence, and that the works of God agree with his word.

Now, in the account he here gives of his dream, by which he had notice of what was coming, we may observe,

I. The time when this alarm was given to



him (v. 4); it was when he was *at rest in his house, and flourishing in his palace*. He had lately conquered Egypt, and with it completed his victories, and ended his wars, and made himself monarch of all those parts of the world, which was about the thirty-fourth or thirty-fifth year of his reign, Ezek. xxix. 17. Then he had this dream, which was accomplished about a year after. Seven years his distraction continued, upon his recovery from which he penned this declaration, lived about two years after, and died in his forty-fifth year. He had undergone a long fatigue in his wars, had made many a tedious and dangerous campaign in the field; but now at length he is *at rest in his house*, and there is *no adversary, nor any evil occurrent*. Note, God can reach the greatest of men with his terrors even when they are most secure, and think themselves at rest and flourishing.

II. The impression it made upon him (v. 5): *I saw a dream which made me afraid*. One would think no little thing would frighten him that had been a man of war from his youth, and used to look the perils of war in the face without change of countenance; yet, when God pleases, a dream strikes a terror upon him. His bed, no doubt, was soft, and easy, and well-guarded, and yet his own *thoughts upon his bed* made him uneasy, and the *visions of his head*, the creatures of his own imagination, *troubled him*. Note, God can make the greatest of men uneasy even when they say to their souls, *Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry*; he can make those that have been the troublers of the world, and have tormented thousands, to be their own troublers, their own tormentors, and those that have been *the terror of the mighty* a terror to themselves. By the consternation which this dream put him into, and the impression it made upon him, he perceived it to be, not an ordinary dream, but sent of God on a special errand.

III. His consulting, in vain, with the magicians and astrologers concerning the meaning of it. He had not now forgotten the dream, as before, *ch. ii*. He had it ready enough, but he wanted to know the interpretation of it and what was prefigured by it, v. 6. Orders are immediately given to summon *all the wise men of Babylon* that were such fools as to pretend by magic, divination, inspecting the entrails of beasts, or observations of the stars, to predict things to come: they must all come together, to see if any, or all of them in consultation, could interpret the king's dream. It is probable that these people had sometimes, in a like case, given the king some sort of satisfaction, and by the rules of their art had answered the king's queries so as to please him, whether it were right or wrong, hit or missed; but now his expectation from them was disappointed: *He told them the dream* (v. 7).

but they *could not tell him the interpretation of it*, though they had boasted, with great assurance (*ch. ii. 4, 7*), that, if they had but the dream told them, they would without fail interpret it. But the key of this dream was in a sacred prophecy (Ezek. xxxi. 3, &c.), where the Assyrian is compared, as Nebuchadnezzar here, to *a tree cut down*, for his pride; and that was a book they had not studied, nor acquainted themselves with, else they might have been let into the mystery of this dream. Providence ordered it so that they should be first puzzled with it, that Daniel's interpreting it afterwards might redound to the glory of the God of Daniel. Now was fulfilled what Isaiah foretold (*ch. xlvii. 12, 13*), that when the ruin of Babylon was drawing on her *enchantments and sorceries*, her *astrologers and star-gazers*, should not be able to do her any service.

IV. The court he made to Daniel, to engage him to expound his dream to him: *At the last Daniel came in*, v. 8. Either he declined associating with the rest because of their badness, or they declined his company because of his goodness; or perhaps the king would rather that his own magicians should have the honour of doing it if they could than that Daniel should have it; or Daniel, being *governor of the wise men* (*ch. ii. 48*), was, as is usual, last consulted. Many make God's word their last refuge, and never have recourse to it till they are driven off from all other succours. He compliments Daniel very highly, takes notice of the name which he had himself given him, in the choice of which he thinks he was very happy and that it was a good omen: "*His name was Belteshazzar, from Bel, the name of my god.*" He applauds his rare endowments: *He has the spirit of the holy gods*, so he tells him to his face (v. 9), with which we may suppose that Daniel was so far from being puffed up that he was rather very much grieved to hear that which he had by gift from the God of Israel, the true and living God, ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar's god, a dunghill deity. Here is a strange medley in Nebuchadnezzar, but such as is commonly found in those that side with their corruptions against their convictions. 1. He retains the language and dialect of his idolatry, and therefore, it is to be feared, is no convert to the faith and worship of the living God. He is an idolater, and his speech betrayeth him. For he speaks of many gods, and is not brought to acquiesce in one as sufficient, no, not in him who is all-sufficient. And some think, when he speaks of *the spirit of the holy gods*, that he supposes there are some evil malignant deities, whom men are concerned to worship, only to prevent their doing them a mischief, and some who are good beneficent deities, and that by the spirit of the latter Daniel was animated. He also owns that Bel was his god still, though he had once and again acknowledged the God



of Israel to be Lord of all, *ch. ii. 47*; iii. 29. He also applauds Daniel, not as a *servant of God*, but as *master of the magicians* (v. 9), supposing his knowledge to differ from theirs, not in kind, but only in degree; and he consulted him not as a prophet, but as a celebrated magician, so endeavouring to save the credit of the art when those blundered and were nonplussed who were masters of the art. See how close his idolatry sat to him. He has got a notion of many gods, and has chosen Bel for his god, and he cannot persuade himself to quit either his notion or his choice, though the absurdity of both had been evidenced to him, more than once, beyond contradiction. He, like other heathens, would not change his gods, though they were no gods, *Jer. ii. 11*. Many persist in a false way only because they think they cannot in honour leave it. See how loose his convictions sat, and how easily he had dropped them. He once called the God of Israel a *God of gods*, *ch. ii. 47*. Now he sets him upon a level with the rest of those whom he calls the *holy gods*. Note, If convictions be not speedily prosecuted, it is a thousand to one but in a little time they will be quite lost and forgotten. Nebuchadnezzar, not going forward with the acknowledgments he had been brought to make of the sovereignty of the true God, soon *went backwards*, and relapsed to the same veneration he had always had for his false gods. And yet, 2. He professes a great opinion of Daniel, whom he knows to be a servant of the true God, and of him only. He looked upon him as one that had such an insight, such a foresight, as none of his magicians had: *I know that no secret troubles thee*. Note, The spirit of prophecy quite outdoes the spirit of divination, even the enemies themselves being judges; for so it was adjudged here, upon a fair trial of skill.

V. The particular account he gives him of his dream.

1. He saw a stately flourishing tree, remarkable above all the trees of the wood. This tree was *planted in the midst of the earth* (v. 10), fitly representing him who reigned in Babylon, which was about the midst of the then known world. His dignity and eminency above all his neighbours were signified by the height of this tree, which was *exceedingly great*; it *reached unto heaven*. He over-topped those about him, and aimed to have divine honours given him; nay, he over-powered those about him, and the potent armies he had the command of, with which he carried all before him, are signified by the strength of this tree: it *grew and was strong*. And so much were Nebuchadnezzar and his growing greatness the talk of the nations, so much had they their eye upon him (some a jealous eye, all a wondering eye), that the sight of this tree is said to be to the *end of all the earth*. This tree had every thing in it that was pleasant to

the eye and good for food (v. 12): *The leaves thereof were fair*, denoting the pomp and splendour of Nebuchadnezzar's court, which was the wonder of strangers and the glory of his own subjects. Nor was this tree for sight and state only, but for use. (1.) For protection; the boughs of it were for shelter both to the beasts and to the fowls. Princes should be a screen to their subjects *from the heat and from the storm*, should expose themselves to secure them, and study how to make them safe and easy. If the bramble be *promoted over the trees*, he invites them to come and *trust in his shadow*, such as it is, *Judg. ix. 15*. It is protection that draws allegiance. The kings of the earth are to their subjects but as the shadow of a great tree; but Christ is to his subjects as the *shadow of a great rock*, *Isa. xxxii. 2*. Nay, because that, though strong, may be cold, they are said to be hidden under the *shadow of his wings* (*Ps. xvii. 8*), where they are not only safe, but warm. (2.) For provision. The Assyrian was compared to a *cedar* (*Ezek. xxxi. 6*), which affords shadow only; but this tree here had much fruit—in it was *meat for all and all flesh was fed of it*. This mighty monarch, it should seem by this, not only was great, but did good; he did not impoverish, but enrich his country, and by his power and interest abroad brought wealth and trade to it. Those that *exercise authority* would be called *benefactors* (*Luke xxii. 25*), and the most effectual course they can take to support their authority is to be really benefactors. And see what is the best that great men, with their wealth and power can attain to, and that is to have the honour of having many to live upon them and to be maintained by them; for, *as goods are increased, those are increased that eat them*.

2. He heard the doom of this tree read, which he perfectly remembered, and relates here, perhaps word for word as he heard it. The sentence was passed upon it by an angel, whom he saw *come down from heaven*, and heard proclaim this sentence aloud. This angel is here called a *watcher*, or *watchman*, not only because angels by their nature are spirits, and therefore neither slumber nor sleep, but because by their office they are *ministering spirits*, and attend continually to their ministrations, watching all opportunities of serving their great Master. They, as watchers, encamp round those that fear God, to deliver them, and *bear them up in their hands*. This angel was a *messenger*, or *ambassador* (so some read it), and a *holy one*. *Holiness becomes God's house*; therefore angels that attend and are employed by him are *holy ones*; they preserve the purity and rectitude of their nature, and are in every thing conformable to the divine will. Let us review the doom passed upon the tree.

(1.) Orders are given that it be cut down (v. 14); now also *the axe is laid to the root* of this tree. Though it is ever so high, ever



so strong, that cannot secure it when its day comes to fall; the beasts and fowls, that are sheltered in and under the boughs of it, are driven away and dispersed; the branches are cropped, the leaves shaken off, and the fruit scattered. Note, Worldly prosperity in its highest degree is a very uncertain thing; and it is no uncommon thing for those that have lived in the greatest pomp and power to be stripped of all that which they trusted to and gloried in. By the turns of providence, those who made a figure become captives, those who lived in plenty, and above what they had, are reduced to straits, and live far below what they had, and those perhaps are brought to be beholden to others who once had many depending upon them and making suit to them. But the *trees of righteousness*, that are *planted in the house of the Lord* and bring forth fruit to him, shall not be cut down, nor shall their leaf wither.

(2.) Care is taken that the root be preserved (v. 15): "*Leave the stump of it in the earth*, exposed to all weathers. There let it lie neglected and buried in the grass. Let the beasts that formerly sheltered themselves under the boughs now repose themselves upon the stump; but that it may not be raked to pieces, nor trodden to dirt, and to show that it is yet reserved for better days, let it be hooped round with a *band of iron and brass*, to keep it firm." Note, God in judgment remembers mercy; and may yet have good things in store for those whose condition seems most forlorn. There is *hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, that through the scent of water it will bud*, Job xiv. 7—9.

(3.) The meaning of this is explained by the angel himself to Nebuchadnezzar, v. 16. Whoever is the person signified by this tree he is sentenced to be deposed from the honour, state, and dignity of a man, to be deprived of the use of his reason, and to be and live like a brute, till *seven times pass over him*. Let a *beast's heart be given unto him*. This is surely the saddest and sorest of all temporal judgments, worse a thousand times than death, and though, like it, least felt by those that lie under it, yet to be dreaded and deprecated more than any other. Nay, whatever outward affliction God is pleased to lay upon us, we have reason to bear it patiently, and to be thankful that he continues to us the use of our reason and the peace of our consciences. But those proud tyrants who *set their heart as the heart of God* (Ezek. xxviii. 2) may justly be deprived of the heart of man, and have a beast's heart given them.

(4.) The truth of it is confirmed (v. 17): *This matter is by the decree of the watchers and the demand by the word of the holy ones*. God has determined it, as a righteous Judge; he has signed this edict; pursuant to his eternal counsel, the decree has gone forth.

And, [1.] The angels of heaven have subscribed to it, as attesting it, approving it, and applauding it. It is by *the decree of the watchers*; not that the great God needs the counsel or concurrence of the angels in any thing he determines or does, but, as he uses their ministration in executing his counsels, so he is sometimes represented, after the manner of men, as if he consulted them.

*Whom shall I send?* Isa. vi. 8. *Who shall persuade Ahab?* 1 Kings xxii. 20. So it denotes the solemnity of this sentence. The king's breves, or short writs, pass, *Teste me ipso—In my presence*; but charters used to be signed, *His testibus—In presence of us whose names are under-written*; such was Nebuchadnezzar's doom; it was by the *decree of the watchers*. [2.] The saints on earth petitioned for it, as well as the angels in heaven: *The demand is by the word of the holy ones*. God's suffering people, that had long groaned under the heavy yoke of Nebuchadnezzar's tyranny, cried to him for vengeance; they made the demand, and God gave this answer to it; for, when the *oppressed cry to God, he will hear*, Exod. xxii. 27. Sentence was passed, in Ahab's time, that there should be no more rain, at Elijah's word, when he *made intercession against Israel*, 1 Kings xvii. 1.

(5.) The design of it is declared. Orders are given for the cutting down of this tree, *to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules*. This judgment must be executed, to convince the unthinking, unbelieving, world, that *verily there is a God that judges in the earth*, a God that governs the world, that not only has a kingdom of his own in it, and administers the affairs of that kingdom, but rules also *in the kingdom of men*, in the dominion that one man has over another, and *gives that to whomsoever he will*; from him promotion comes, Ps. lxxv. 6, 7. He advances men to power and dominion that little expected it, and crosses the projects of the ambitious and aspiring. Sometimes he *sets up the basest of men*, and serves his own purposes by them. He sets up mean men, as David from the sheepfold; *he raises the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, Ps. cxlii. 7, 8. Nay, sometimes he sets up bad men, to be a scourge to a provoking people. Thus he can do, thus he may do, thus he often does, and *gives not account of any of his matters*. By humbling Nebuchadnezzar it was designed that the living should be made to know this. The dead know it, that have gone to the world of spirits, the world of retribution; they know that *the Most High rules*; but the living must be made to know it and lay it to heart, that they may make their peace with God before it be too late.

Thus has Nebuchadnezzar fully and faithfully related his dream, what he saw and what he heard, and then demands of Daniel the interpretation of it (v. 18), for he found

that no one else was able to interpret it, but was confident that he was: *For the spirit of the holy gods is in thee*, or of the *Holy God*, the proper title of the God of Israel. Much may be expected from those that have in them the *Spirit of the Holy God*. Whether Nebuchadnezzar had any jealousy that it was his own doom that was read by this dream does not appear; perhaps he was so vain and secure as to imagine that it was some other prince that was a rival with him, whose fall he had the pleasing prospect of given him in this dream; but, be it for him or against him, he is very solicitous to know the true meaning of it and depends upon Daniel to give it to him. Note, When God gives us general warnings of his judgments we should be desirous to understand his mind in them, to hear *the Lord's voice crying in the city*.

19 Then Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, The dream *be* to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. 20 The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; 21 Whose leaves *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: 22 *It is* thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. 23 And whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and *let* his portion *be* with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; 24 This *is* the interpretation, O king, and this *is* the decree of the Most High, which is come upon my lord the king: 25 That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the

beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. 26 And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. 27 Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

We have here the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; and when once it is applied to himself, and it is declared that he is the tree in the dream (*Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur—Change but the name, the fable speaks of thee*), when once it is said, *Thou art the man*, there needs little more to be said for the explication of the dream. *Out of his own mouth he is judged; so shall his doom be, he himself has decided it.* The thing was so plain that Daniel, upon hearing the dream, was *astonished for one hour*, v. 19. He was struck with amazement and terror at so great a judgment coming upon so great a prince. *His flesh trembled for fear of God.* He was likewise struck with confusion when he found himself under a necessity of being the man that must bring to the king *these heavy tidings*, which, having received so many favours from the king, he had rather he should have heard from any one else; so far is he from desiring the woeful day that he dreads it, and the thoughts of it trouble him. Those that come after the ruined sinner are said to be *astonished at his day*, as *those that went before*, and saw it coming (as Daniel here), *were affrighted*, Job xviii. 20.

I. The preface to the interpretation is a civil compliment which, as a courtier, he passes upon the king. The king observed him to stand as one astonished, and, thinking he was loth to speak out for fear of offending him, he encouraged him to deal plainly and faithfully with him: *Let not the dream, nor the interpretation thereof, trouble thee.* This he speaks either, 1. As one that sincerely desired to know the truth. Note, Those that consult the oracles of God must be ready to receive them as they are, whether they be for them or against them, and must accordingly give their ministers leave to be free with them. Or, 2. As one that despised the truth, and set it at defiance. When we see how regardless he was of this warning afterwards we are tempted to think that



this was his meaning: "*Let it not trouble thee, for I am resolved it shall not trouble me; nor will I lay it to heart.*" But, whether he have any concern for himself or no, Daniel is concerned for him, and therefore wishes, "*The dream be to those that hate thee.*" Let the ill it bodes light on the head of thy enemies, not on thy head." Though Nebuchadnezzar was an idolater, a persecutor, and an oppressor of the people of God, yet he was, at present, Daniel's prince; and therefore, though Daniel foresees, and is now going to foretell, ill concerning him, he dares not wish ill to him.

II. The interpretation itself is only a repetition of the dream, with application to the king. "*As for the tree which thou sawest flourishing (v. 20, 21), it is thou, O king!*" v. 22. And willing enough would the king be to hear this (as, before, to hear, *Thou art the head of gold*), but for that which follows. He shows the king his present prosperous state in the glass of his own dream: "*Thy greatness has grown and reaches as near to heaven as human greatness can do, and thy dominion is to the end of the earth,*" ch. ii. 37, 38. "*As for the doom passed upon the tree (v. 23), it is the decree of the Most High, which comes upon my lord the king,*" v. 24. He must not only be deposed from his throne, *but driven from men*, and being deprived of his reason, and having a beast's heart given him, his dwelling shall be *with the beasts of the field*, and with them he shall be a fellow-commoner: he shall *eat grass as oxen*, and, like them, lie out all weathers, and be *wet with the dew of heaven*, and this till *seven times* pass over him, that is, *seven years*; and then he shall know that the *Most High rules*, and when he is brought to know and own this he shall be restored to his dominion again (v. 26): "*Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee*, shall remain as firm as the *stump of the tree* in the ground, and thou shalt have it, *after thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.*" God is here called the *heavens*, because it is in heaven that he has *prepared his throne* (Ps. ciii. 19), thence he *beholds all the sons of men*, Ps. xxxiii. 13. The *heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's*; and the influence which the visible heavens have upon this earth is intended as a faint representation of the dominion the God of heaven has over this lower world; we are said to *sin against heaven*, Luke xv. 18. Note, Then only we may expect comfortably to enjoy our right in, and government of, both ourselves and others, when we dutifully acknowledge God's title to, and dominion over, us and all we have.

III. The close of the interpretation is the pious counsel which Daniel, as a prophet, gave the king, v. 27. Whether he appeared concerned or not at the interpretation of the dream, a word of advice would be very seasonable—if careless, to awaken him, if

troubled, to comfort him; and it is not inconsistent with the dream and the interpretation of it, for Daniel knew not but it might be conditional, like the prediction of Nineveh's destruction. Observe, 1. How humbly he gives his advice, and with what tenderness and respect: "*O king! let my counsel be acceptable unto thee*; take it in good part, as coming from love, and well-meant, and let it not be misinterpreted." Note, Sinners need to be courted to their own good, and respectfully entreated to do well for themselves. The apostle beseeches men to *suffer the word of exhortation*, Heb. xiii. 22. We think it a good point gained if people will be persuaded to take good counsel kindly; nay, if they will take it patiently. 2. What his advice is. He does not counsel him to enter into a course of physic, for the preventing of the distemper in his head, but to break off a course of sin that he was in, to reform his life. He wronged his own subjects, and dealt unfairly with his allies; and he must *break off this by righteousness*, by rendering to all their due, making amends for wrong done, and not triumphing over right with might. He had been cruel to the poor, to God's poor, to the poor Jews; and he must *break off this iniquity by showing mercy* to those poor, pitying those oppressed ones, setting them at liberty or making their captivity easy to them. Note, It is necessary, in repentance, that we not only *cease to do evil, but learn to do well*, not only do no wrong to any, but do good to all. 3. What the motive is with which he backs this advice: *If it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*. Though it should not wholly prevent the judgment, yet by this means a reprieve may be obtained, as by *Ahab's humbling himself*, 1 Kings xxi. 29. Either the trouble may be the longer before it comes or the shorter when it does come; yet he cannot assure him of this, but *it may be*, it may prove so. Note, The mere probability of preventing a temporal judgment is inducement enough to a work so good in itself as the leaving off of our sins and reforming of our lives, much more the certainty of preventing our eternal ruin. "*That will be a healing of thy error*" (so some read it); "*thus the quarrel will be taken up, and all will be well again.*"

28 All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. 30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? 31 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebu-

chadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. 32 And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. 33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

We have here Nebuchadnezzar's dream accomplished, and Daniel's application of it to him justified and confirmed. How he took it we are not told, whether he was pleased with Daniel or displeased; but here we have,

I. God's patience with him: *All this came upon him*, but not till twelve months after (v. 29), so long there was a *lengthening of his tranquillity*, though it does not appear that he *broke off his sins*, or showed any *mercy to the poor captives*, for this was still God's quarrel with him, that he *opened not the house of his prisoners*, Isa. xiv. 17. Daniel having counselled him to repent, God so far confirmed his word that he gave him space to repent; he *let him alone this year also*, this one year more, before he brought this judgment upon him. Note, God is long-suffering with provoking sinners, because he is not willing that *any should perish*, but that *all should come to repentance*, 2 Pet. iii. 9.

II. His pride, and haughtiness, and abuse of that patience. He walked in the *palace of the kingdom of Babylon*, in pomp and pride, pleasing himself with the view of that vast city, which, with all the territories thereunto belonging, was under his command, and he said, either to himself or to those about him, perhaps some foreigners to whom he was showing his kingdom and the glory of it, *Is not this great Babylon?* Yes, it is great, of vast extent, no less than forty-five miles compass within the walls. It is full of inhabitants, and they are full of wealth. It is a *golden city*, and that is enough to proclaim it great, Isa. xiv. 4. See the grandeur of the houses, walls, towers, and public edifices. Every thing in Babylon he thinks looks great; "*and this great Babylon I have built.*" Babylon was built many ages before he was born, but because he had fortified and beautified it, and we may suppose much of it was rebuilt during his long and prosperous reign, he boasts that he has built it, as Augustus Cæsar boasted concerning Rome,

*Lateritiam inveni, marmoream reliqui--I found it brick, but I left it marble.* He boasts that he built it *for the house of the kingdom*, that is, the metropolis of his empire. This vast city, compared with the countries that belonged to his dominions, was but as one house. He built it with the assistance of his subjects, yet boasts that he did it *by the might of his power*; he built it for his security and convenience, yet, as if he had no occasion for it, boasts that he built it *purely for the honour of his majesty*. Note, Pride and self-conceitedness are sins that most easily beset great men, who have great things in the world. They are apt to take the glory to themselves which is due to God only.

III. His punishment for his pride. When he was thus strutting, and vaunting himself, and adoring his own shadow, *while the proud word was in the king's mouth* the powerful word came from heaven, by which he was immediately deprived, 1. Of his honour as a king: *The kingdom has departed from thee*. When he thought he had erected impregnable bulwarks for the preserving of his kingdom, now, in an instant, it *has departed from him*; when he thought it so well guarded that none could take it from him, behold, it departs of itself. As soon as he becomes utterly incapable to manage it, it is of course taken out of his hands. 2. He is deprived of his honour as a man. He loses his reason, and by that means loses his dominion: *They shall drive thee from men*, v. 32. And it was fulfilled (v. 33): he was *driven from men the same hour*. On a sudden he fell stark mad, distracted in the highest degree that ever any man was. His understanding and memory were gone, and all the faculties of a rational soul broken, so that he became a perfect brute in the shape of a man. He went naked, and on all four, like a brute, did himself shun the society of reasonable creatures and run wild into the fields and woods, and was driven out by his own servants, who, after some time of trial, despairing of his return to his right mind, abandoned him, and looked after him no more. He had not the spirit of a beast of prey (that of the royal lion) but of the abject and less honourable species, for he was made to *eat grass as oxen*; and, probably, he did not speak with human voice, but lowed like an ox. Some think that his body was all covered with hair; however, *the hair of his head and beard*, being never cut nor combed, grew like *eagles' feathers*, and *his nails like birds' claws*. Let us pause a little, and view this miserable spectacle; and let us receive instruction from it. (1.) Let us see here what a mercy it is to have the use of our reason, how thankful we ought to be for it, and how careful we ought to be not to do any thing which may either provoke God or may have a natural tendency to put us out of the possession of our own souls. Let us learn how to value our own reason, and to pity the case of those



that are under the prevailing power of melancholy or distraction, or are delirious, and to be very tender in our censures of them and conduct towards them, for it is a trial common to men, and a case which, some time or other, may be our own. (2.) Let us see here the vanity of human glory and greatness. Is this Nebuchadnezzar the Great? What this despicable animal that is meaner than the poorest beggar? Is this he that looked so glorious on the throne, so formidable in the camp, that had politics enough to subdue and govern kingdoms, and now has not so much sense as to keep his own clothes on his back? *Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?* Isa. xiv. 16. Never let the *wise man* then *glory in his wisdom*, nor the *mighty man in his strength*. (3.) Let us see here how God resists the proud, and delights to abase them and put contempt upon them. Nebuchadnezzar would be more than a man, and therefore God justly makes him less than a man, and puts him upon a level with the beasts who set up for a rival with his Maker. See Job xl. 11—13.

34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? 36 At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. 37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

We have here Nebuchadnezzar's recovery from his distraction, and his return to his right mind, *at the end of the days* prefixed, that is, of the seven years. So long he continued a monument of God's justice and a trophy of his victory over the children of pride, and he was made more so by being struck mad than if he had been in an instant

struck dead with a thunderbolt; yet it was a mercy to him that he was kept alive, for while there is life there is hope that we may yet praise God, as he did here: *At the end of the days* (says he), *I lifted up my eyes unto heaven* (v. 34), looked no longer down towards the earth as a beast, but began to look up as a man. *Os homini sublime dedit—Heaven gave to man an erect countenance.* But there was more in it than this; he looked up as a devout man, as a penitent, as a humble petitioner for mercy, being perhaps never till now made sensible of his own misery. And now,

I. He has the use of his reason so far restored to him that with it he glorifies God, and humbles himself under his mighty hand. He was told that he should continue in that forlorn case till he should know that the Most High rules, and here we have him brought to the knowledge of this: *My understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High.* Note, Those may justly be reckoned void of understanding that do not bless and praise God; nor do men ever rightly use their reason till they begin to be religious, nor live as men till they live to the glory of God. As reason is the substratum or subject of religion (so that creatures which have no reason are not capable of religion), so religion is the crown and glory of reason, and we have our reason in vain, and shall one day wish we had never had it, if we do not glorify God with it. This was the first act of Nebuchadnezzar's returning reason; and, when this became the employment of it, he was then, and not till then, qualified for all the other enjoyments of it. And till he was for a great while disabled to exercise it in other things he never was brought to apply it to this, which is the great end for which our reason is given us. His folly was the means whereby he became wise; he was not recovered by his dream of this judgment (that was soon forgotten like a dream), but he is made to feel it, and then his *ear is opened to discipline.* To bring him to himself, he must first be *beside himself.* And by this it appears that what good thoughts there were in his mind, and what good work was wrought there, were not of himself (for he was not his own man), but it was the gift of God. Let us see what Nebuchadnezzar is now at length effectually brought to the acknowledgment of; and we may learn from it what to believe concerning God. 1. That the *most high God lives for ever*, and his being knows neither change nor period, for he has it of himself. His flatterers often complimented him with, *O king! live for ever.* But he is now convinced that no king lives for ever, but the God of Israel only, who is still the same. 2. That his kingdom is like himself, *everlasting*, and his *dominion from generation to generation*; there is no succession, no revolution, in his kingdom. As he lives, so he reigns, for ever, and of his government

there is no end. 3. That *all nations* before him are *as nothing*. He has no need of them; he makes no account of them. The greatest of men, in comparison with him, are less than nothing. Those that think highly of God think meanly of themselves. 4. That his kingdom is universal, and both *the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth* are his subjects, and under his check and control. Both angels and men are employed by him, and are accountable to him; the highest angel is not above his command, nor the meanest of the children of men beneath his cognizance. The angels of heaven are his armies, the inhabitants of the earth his tenants. 5. That his power is irresistible, and his sovereignty uncontrollable, for he *does according to his will*, according to his design and purpose, according to his decree and counsel; whatever he pleases that he does; whatever he appoints that he performs; and none can resist his will, change his counsel, nor *stay his hand, nor say unto him, What doest thou?* None can arraign his proceedings, inquire into the meaning of them, nor demand a reason for them. Woe to him that strives with his Maker, that says to him, *What doest thou?* Or, *Why doest thou so?* 6. That every thing which God does is well done: *His works are truth*, for they all agree with his word. *His ways are judgment*, both wise and righteous, exactly consonant to the rules both of prudence and equity, and no fault is to be found with them. 7. That he has power to humble the haughtiest of his enemies that act in contradiction to him or competition with him: *Those that walk in pride he is able to abase* (v. 37); he is able to deal with those that are most confident of their own sufficiency to contend with him.

II. He has the use of his reason so far restored to him as with it to re-enjoy himself, and the pleasures of his re-established prosperity (v. 36): *At the same time my reason returned to me*; he had said before (v. 34) that his *understanding returned* to him, and here he mentions it again, for the use of our reason is a mercy we can never be sufficiently thankful for. Now his *lords sought to him*; he did not need to seek to them, and they soon perceived, not only that he had recovered his reason and was fit to rule, but that he had recovered it with advantage, and was more fit to rule than ever. It is probable that the dream and the interpretation of it were well known, and much talked of, at court; and the former part of the prediction being fulfilled, that he should go distracted, they doubted not but that, according to the prediction, he should come to himself again at seven years' end, and, in confidence of that, when the time was expired they were ready to receive him; and then *his honour and brightness returned to him*, the same that he had before his madness seized him. He is now established in his kingdom as firmly as if there had been no interruption given

him. *He becomes a fool, that he may be wise*, wiser than ever; and he that but the other day was in the depth of disgrace and ignominy has now *excellent majesty added to him*, beyond what he had when he went from kingdom to kingdom conquering and to conquer. Note, 1. When men are brought to honour God, particularly by a penitent confession of sin, and a believing acknowledgment of his sovereignty, then, and not till then, they may expect that God will put honour upon them, will not only restore them to the dignity they lost by the sin of the first Adam, but *add excellent majesty to them* from the righteousness and grace of the second Adam. 2. Afflictions shall last no longer than till they have done the work for which they were sent. When this prince is brought to own God's dominion over him he is then restored to a dominion over himself. 3. All the accounts we take and give of God's dealing with us ought to conclude with praises to him. When Nebuchadnezzar is restored to his kingdom, he *praises, and extols, and honours the King of heaven* (v. 37), before he applies himself to his secular business. Therefore we have our reason, that we may be in a capacity of praising him, and therefore our prosperity, that we may have cause to praise him.

It was not long after this that Nebuchadnezzar ended his life and reign. Abydenus, quoted by Eusebius (*Præp. Evang.* i. 9), reports, from the tradition of the Chaldeans, that upon his death-bed he foretold the taking of Babylon by Cyrus. Whether he continued in the same good mind that here he seems to have been in we are not told, nor does any thing appear to the contrary but that he did; and, if so great a *blasphemer and persecutor* did find mercy, he was not the last. And, if our charity may reach so far as to hope he did, we must admire free grace, by which he lost his wits for a while, that he might save his soul for ever.

## CHAP. V.

The destruction of the kingdom of Babylon had been long and often foretold when it was at a distance; in this chapter we have it accomplished, and a prediction of it the very same night that it was accomplished. Belshazzar now reigned in Babylon; some compute he had reigned seventeen years, others but three; we have here the story of his exit and the period of his kingdom. We must know that about two years before this Cyrus king of Persia, a growing monarch, came against Babylon with a great army; Belshazzar met him, fought him, and was routed by him in a pitched battle. He and his scattered forces retired into the city, where Cyrus besieged them. They were very secure, because the river Euphrates was their bulwark, and they had twenty years' provision in the city; but in the second year of the siege he took it, as is here related. We have in this chapter, 1. The riotous, idolatrous, sacrilegious feast which Belshazzar made, in which he filled up the measure of his iniquity, ver. 1-4. II. The alarm given him in the midst of his jollity by a handwriting on the wall, which none of his wise men could read or tell him the meaning of, ver. 5-9. III. The interpretation of the mystical characters by Daniel, who was at length brought in to him, and dealt plainly with him, and showed him his doom written, ver. 10-23. IV. The immediate accomplishment of the interpretation in the slaying of the king and seizing of the kingdom, ver. 30, 31.

**BELSHAZZAR** the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. 2 Belshazzar, whiles he tasted



the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which *was* in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. 3 Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which *was* at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. 5 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. 7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. *And* the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and show me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. 8 Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. 9 Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were estonied.

We have here Belshazzar the king very gay, but all of a sudden very gloomy, and in straits in the fulness of his sufficiency. See how he affronts God, and God affrights him; and wait what will be the issue of this contest, and whether he that hardened his heart against God prospered.

1. See how the king affronted God, and put contempt upon him. He *made a great feast, or banquet of wine*; probably it was some anniversary solemnity, in honour of his birth-day or coronation-day, or in honour of some of their idols. Historians say that Cyrus, who was now with his army besieging Babylon, knew of this feast, and presuming that they then would be off their guard, *somno vinoque sepulti—buried in sleep*

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*and wine*, took that opportunity to attack the city, and so with the more ease made himself master of it. Belshazzar upon this occasion invited a *thousand of his lords* to come and drink with him. Perhaps they were such as had signalised themselves in defence of the city against the besiegers; or these were his great council of war, with whom, when they had well drunk, he would advise what was further to be done. And they were to look upon it as a great favour that he *drank wine before* them, for it was the pride of those eastern kings to be seldom seen. He drank wine before them, for he made this feast, as Ahasuerus did, to show the *honour of his majesty*. Now in this sumptuous feast, 1. He put an affront upon the providence of God and bade defiance to his judgments. His city was now besieged; a powerful enemy was at his gates; his life and kingdom lay at stake. In all this the hand of the Lord had gone out against him, and by it he called him to *weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth*. God's voice cried in the city, as Jonah to Nineveh, *Yet forty days, or fewer, and Babylon shall be destroyed*. He should therefore, like the king of Nineveh, have proclaimed a fast; but, as one resolved to walk contrary to God, he proclaims a feast and behold *joy and gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine*, as if he dared the Almighty to do his worst, Isa. xxii. 12, 13. To show how little fear he had of being forced to surrender, for want of provisions, he spent thus extravagantly. Note, Security and sensuality are sad presages of approaching ruin. Those that will not be warned by the judgments of God may expect to be wounded by them. 2. He put an affront upon the temple of God, and bade defiance to his sanctuary, v. 2. *While he tasted the wine, he commanded to bring the vessels of the temple, that they might drink in them*. When he tasted how rich and fine the wine was, "O," said he, "it is a pity but we should have holy vessels to drink such delicious wine as this in," which was looked upon as a piece of wit, and, to carry on the humour, the vessels of the temple were immediately sent for. Nay, there seems to have been something more in it than a frolic, and that it was done in a malicious despite to the God of Israel. The heart of his people was very much upon these sacred vessels, as appears from Jer. xxvii. 16, 18. Their principal care, at their return, was about these, Ezra i. 7. Now, we may suppose, they had an expectation of their deliverance approaching, reckoning the seventy years of their captivity near a period; and some of them might perhaps have given out some words to that purport, that shortly they should have the vessels of the sanctuary restored to them, in defiance of which Belshazzar here proclaims them to be his own, will keep them in store no longer, but will make use of them

among his own plate. Note, That mirth is sinful indeed, and fills the measure of men's iniquity apace, which profanes sacred things and jests with them. This ripened Babylon for ruin—that no songs would serve them but the *songs of Zion* (Ps. cxxxvii. 3), no vessels but the vessels of the sanctuary. Let those who thus sacrilegiously alienate what is dedicated to God and his honour know that he *will not be mocked*. 3. He put an affront upon God himself, and bade defiance to his deity; for *they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, v. 4*. They gave that glory to images, the work of their own hands and creatures of their own fancy, which is due to the true and living God only. They praised them either with sacrifices offered to them or with songs sung in honour of them. When their heads were giddy, and their hearts merry, with wine, they were in the fittest frame to *praise the gods of gold and silver, wood and stone*; for one would think that men in their senses, who had the command of a clear and sober thought, could not be guilty of so gross an absurdity; they must be intoxicated ere they could be so infatuated. Drunken worshippers, who are not men, but beasts, are the most proper for the service of dunghill deities, that are not gods, but devils. *They have erred through wine, Isa. xxviii. 7*. They drank wine, and praised their idol-gods, as if they had been the founders of their feast and the givers of all good things to them. Or, when they were drinking wine, they praised their gods by drinking healths to them; and the king *drank wine before them (v. 1)*, that is, he began the health, first to this god, and then to the other, till they went through the *bead-roll* or *farrago* of them, those of *wood and stone* not excepted. Note, Immorality and impiety, vice and profaneness, strengthen the hands and advance the interests one of another. Drunken frolics were an introduction to idolatry, and then idolatrous healths were a shoeing-horn to further drunkenness.

II. See how God affrighted the king, and struck a terror upon him. Belshazzar and his lords are in the midst of their revels, the cups going round apace, and all upon the merry pin, drinking confusion, it may be, to Cyrus and his army, and roaring out huzzas, in confidence of the speedy raising of the siege; but the hour had come when that must be fulfilled which had been long ago said of the king of Babylon, when his city should be besieged by the Persians and Medes, Isa. xxi. 2—4. *The night of my pleasures has he turned into fear to me*. The mirth of this ball at court must be spoiled, and a damp cast upon their jollity, though the king himself be master of the revels; immediately, when God speaks the word, we have him and all his guests in the utmost confusion, and the end of their mirth is heaviness. 1. There appear the *fingers of a man's hand writing on the plaster of the wall*, before the

king's face (v. 5), "the angel Gabriel," say the rabbin, "directing these fingers and writing by them." "That divine hand" (says a rabbi of our own, Dr. Lightfoot) "that had written the two tables for a law to his people now writes the doom of Babel and Belshazzar upon the wall." Here was nothing sent to frighten them which made a noise, or threatened their lives, no claps of thunder nor flashes of lightning, no destroying angel with his sword drawn in his hand, only a pen in the hand, writing upon the wall, *over against the candlestick*, where they might all see it by the light of their own candle. Note, God's written word is sufficient to put the proudest boldest sinners into a fright, when he is pleased to give it the setting on. The king saw the *part of the hand that wrote*, but saw not the person whose hand it was, which made the thing more frightful. Note, What we see of God, the part of the hand that writes in the book of the creatures and the book of the scriptures (*Lo, these are parts of his ways, Job xxvi. 14*), may serve to possess us with awful thoughts concerning that of God which we do not see. If this be *the finger of God*, what is his arm made bare? And what is he? 2. The king is immediately seized with a panic fear (v. 6): *His countenance was changed* (his colour went and came); *the joints of his loins were loosed*, so that he had no strength in them, but was struck with a pain in his back, as is usual in a great fright; *his knees smote one against another*, so violently did he tremble like an aspen leaf. But what was the matter? Why is he in such a fright? He perceives not what is written, and how does he know but it may be some happy presage of deliverance to him and to his kingdom? But the business was *his thoughts troubled him*; his own guilty conscience flew in his face, and told him that he had no reason to expect any good news from heaven, and that the hand of an angel could write nothing but terror to him. He that knew himself liable to the justice of God immediately concluded this to be an arrest in his name, a summons to appear before him. Note, God can soon awaken the most secure and make the heart of the stoutest sinner to tremble; and there needs no more to do it than to let loose his own thoughts upon him; they will soon play the tyrant, and give him trouble enough. 3. The wise men of Babylon are immediately called in, to see what they can make of this writing upon the wall, v. 7. The king *cried aloud*, as one in haste, as one in earnest, to bring the whole college of magicians, to try if they can *read this writing, and show the interpretation of it*; for the king and all his lords cannot pretend to it, it is out of their sphere. The study of divine revelation (such as they had, or thought they had) and converse with the world of spirits were by the heathen confined to one profession, and



no other meddled with it; but what is written to us by the finger of God is legible to all; whoever will may read the mind of God in the scriptures. To engage these wise men to exert the utmost of their skill in this matter, and provoke them to an emulation in the attempt, he promised that whoever would give him a satisfactory account of this writing should be dignified with the highest honours of the court. He knew what these pretenders to wisdom aimed at, and what would please them, and therefore promised them a *scarlet robe* and a *gold chain*, glorious things in the eyes of those that know no better. Nay, he should be *primus par regni*—*chief minister of state, the third ruler* in the kingdom, next to the king and his heir apparent. 4. The king is disappointed in his expectations from them; they can none of them *read the writing*, much less interpret it (v. 8), which increases the king's confusion, v. 9. He likes the thing yet worse and worse, and fears that mischief is towards him. His *lords* also, that had been partners with him in his jollity, are now sharers with him in his terrors; they also were *astonished* and at their wits' end; and neither their numbers nor their refreshment by wine would serve to keep up their spirits. The reason why the wise men could not read the writing was not because it was written in any language or characters unknown to them, but God either cast a mist before their eyes or put such confusion upon their spirits that they could not read it, that the honour of expounding this mystical writing might be reserved for Daniel. Note, The terror of an awakened convinced conscience may justly be increased by the utter insufficiency of all creatures to give it ease or satisfaction.

10 *Now* the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet-house: *and* the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: 11 There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom *is* the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, *I say*, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers; 12 Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and

he will show the interpretation. 13 Then was Daniel brought in before the king. *And* the king spake, and said unto Daniel, *Art* thou that Daniel, which *art* of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? 14 I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods *is* in thee, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. 15 And now the wise *men*, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not show the interpretation of the thing: 16 And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and *have* a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. 17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18 O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: 19 And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: 21 And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. 22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not hum-

bled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; 23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: 24 Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. 25 And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. 27 TEKEL; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28 PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. 29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Here is, I. The information given to the king, by the queen-mother, concerning Daniel, how fit he was to be consulted in this difficult case. It is supposed that this queen was the widow of Evil-Merodach, and was that famous Nitocris whom Herodotus mentions as a woman of extraordinary prudence. She was not present at the feast, as the king's wives and concubines were (v. 2); it was not agreeable to her age and gravity to keep a merry night. But, tidings of the fright which the king and his lords were put into being brought to her apartment, she came herself to the banqueting-house, to recommend to the king a physician for his melancholy. She entreated him not to be discouraged by the insufficiency of his wise men to solve this riddle, for that there was a man in his kingdom that had more than once helped his grandfather at such a dead lift, and, no doubt, could help him, v. 11, 12. She could not undertake to read the writing herself, but directed him to one that could; let Daniel be called now, who should have been called first. Now observe, 1. The high character she gives of Daniel: He is a man in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, who has something in him more than human, not only the spirit of a man, which, in all, is the candle of the Lord, but a divine spirit. Accord-

ing to the language of her country and religion, she could not give a higher encomium of any man; she speaks honourably of him as a man that had, (1.) An admirably good head: *Light, and understanding, and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him.* Such an insight had he into things secret, and such a foresight of things to come, that it was evident he was divinely inspired; he had *knowledge and understanding* beyond all the other wise men for *interpreting dreams*, explaining enigmas or hard sentences, untying knots, and resolving doubts. Solomon had a wonderful sagacity of this kind; but it should seem that in these things Daniel had more of an immediate divine direction. *Behold, a greater than Solomon himself is here.* Yet what was the wisdom of them both compared with the treasures of wisdom hidden in Christ? (2.) He had an admirably good heart: *An excellent spirit was found in him*, which was a great ornament to his wisdom and knowledge, and qualified him to receive that gift; for God gives to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy. He was of a humble, holy, heavenly spirit, had a devout and gracious spirit, a spirit of zeal for the glory of God and the good of men. This was indeed an excellent spirit. 2. The account she gives of the respect that Nebuchadnezzar had for him; he was much in his favour, and was preferred by him: "*The king thy father*" (that is, thy grandfather, but even to many generations Nebuchadnezzar might well be called the father of that royal family, for he it was that raised it to such a pitch of grandeur), "*the king, I say, thy father, made him master of the magicians.*" Perhaps Belshazzar had sometimes, in his pride, spoken slightly of Nebuchadnezzar, and his politics, and the methods of his government, and the ministers he employed, and thought himself wiser than he; and therefore his mother harps upon that. "*The king, I say, thy father*, to whose good management all thou hast is owing, he pronounced him chief of, and gave him dominion over, all the wise men of Babylon, and named him Belteshazzar, according to the name of his god, thinking thereby to put honour upon him;" but Daniel, by constantly making use of his Jewish name himself (which he resolved to keep, in token of his faithful adherence to his religion), had worn out that name; only the queen-dowager remembered it, otherwise he was generally called Daniel. Note, It is a very good office to revive the remembrance of the good services of worthy men, who are themselves modest, and willing that they should be forgotten. 3. The motion she makes concerning him: *Let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.* By this it appears that Daniel was now forgotten at court. Belshazzar was a stranger to him, knew not that he had such a jewel in his kingdom. With the new king there came in a new



ministry, and the old one was laid aside. Note, There are a great many valuable men, and such as might be made very useful, that lie long buried in obscurity, and some that have done eminent services that live to be overlooked and taken no notice of; but, whatever men are, God is not unrighteous to forget the services done to his kingdom. Daniel, being turned out of his place, lived privately, and sought not any opportunity to come into notice again; yet he lived near the court and within call, though Babylon was now besieged, that he might be ready, if there were occasion, to do any good office, by what interest he had among the great ones, for the children of his people. But Providence so ordered it that now, just at the fall of that monarchy, he should by the queen's means be brought to court again, that he might lie there ready for preferment in the ensuing government. Thus do the righteous shine forth out of obscurity, and before honour is humility.

II. The introducing of Daniel to the king, and his request to him to read and expound the writing. Daniel was brought in before the king, v. 13. He was now nearly ninety years of age, so that his years, and honours, and former preferments, might have entitled him to a free admission into the king's presence; yet he was willing to be conducted in, as a stranger, by the master of the ceremonies. Note, 1. The king asks, with an air of haughtiness: *Art thou that Daniel who art of the children of the captivity?* Being a Jew, and a captive, he was loth to be beholden to him if he could help it. 2. He tells him what an encomium he had heard of him (v. 14), *that the spirit of the gods was in him*; and he had sent for him to try whether he deserved so high a character or no. 3. He acknowledges that all the wise men of Babylon were baffled; they could not read this writing, nor show the interpretation, v. 16. But, 4. He promises him the same rewards that he had promised them if he would do it, v. 16. It was strange that the magicians, when now, and in Nebuchadnezzar's time, once and again, they were nonplussed, did not attempt something to save their credit; if they had with a good assurance said, "This is the meaning of such a dream, such a writing," who could disprove them? But God so ordered it that they had nothing at all to say, as, when Christ was born, the heathen oracles were struck dumb.

III. The interpretation which Daniel gave of these mystic characters, which was so far from easing the king of his fears that we may suppose it increased them rather. Daniel was now in years, and Belshazzar was young; and therefore he seems to take a greater liberty of dealing plainly and roundly with him than he had done upon the like occasions with Nebuchadnezzar. In reproving any man, especially great men, there is need of wisdom to consider all circumstances; for

they are the reproofs of instruction that are the way of life. In Daniel's discourse here,

1. He undertakes to read the writing which gave them this alarm, and to show them the interpretation of it, v. 17. He slights the offer he made him of rewards, is not pleased that it was mentioned, for he is not one of those that *divine for money*; what gratuities Nebuchadnezzar gave him afterwards he gladly accepted, but he scorned to bargain for them, or to read the *writing to the king* for and in consideration of such and such honours promised him. No: "*Let thy gifts be to thyself*, for they will not be long thine, and *give thy fee to another*, to any of the wise men whom thou wouldst have most wished to earn it; I value it not." Daniel sees his kingdom now at its last gasp, and therefore looks with contempt upon his gifts and rewards. And thus should we despise all the gifts and rewards that this world can give did we see, as we may by faith, its final period hastening on. Let it give its perishing gifts to another; there are better gifts which we have our eyes and hearts upon; but let us do our duty in the world, do it all the real service we can, read God's writing to it in a profession of religion, and by an agreeable conversation make known the interpretation of it, and then trust God for his gifts, his rewards, in comparison with which all the world can give is mere trash and trifles.

2. He largely recounts to the king God's dealings with his father Nebuchadnezzar, which were intended for instruction and warning to him, v. 18, 21. This is not intended for a flourish or an amusement, but is a necessary preliminary to the interpretation of the writing. Note, That we may understand aright what God is doing with us, it is of use to us to review what he has done with others.

(1.) He describes the great dignity and power to which the divine Providence had advanced Nebuchadnezzar, v. 18, 19. He had a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour, for aught we know, above what any heathen prince ever had before him; he thought that he got his glory by his own extraordinary conduct and courage, and ascribed his successes to a projecting active genius of his own; but Daniel tells him who now enjoyed what he had laboured for that it was the *most high God, the God of gods and Lord of kings* (as Nebuchadnezzar himself had called him), that gave him *that kingdom*, that vast dominion, that majesty wherewith he presided in the affairs of it, and that *glory and honour* which by his prosperous management he acquired. Note, Whatever degree of outward prosperity any arrive at, they must own that it is of God's giving, not their own getting. Let it never be said, *My might*, and *the power of my hand*, have gotten me this wealth, this preferment; but let it always be remembered that it is *God that gives men power to get wealth*, and gives success to their endeavours. Now the power which God gave



to Nebuchadnezzar is here described to be very great in respect both of ability and of authority. [1.] His ability was so strong that it was irresistible; such was the majesty that God gave him, so numerous were the forces he had at command, and such an admirable dexterity he had at commanding them, that, which way soever his sword turned, it prospered. He could captivate and subdue nations by threatening them, without striking a stroke, for *all people trembled and feared before him*, and would compound with him for their lives upon any terms. See what force is, and what the fear of it does. It is that by which the brutal part of the world, even of the world of mankind, both governs and is governed. [2.] His authority was so absolute that it was uncontrollable. The power which was allowed him, which descended upon him, or which, at least, he assumed, was without contradiction, was absolute and despotic, none shared with him either in the legislative or in the executive part of it. In dispensing punishments he condemned or acquitted at pleasure: *Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he saved alive*, though both were equally innocent or equally guilty. The *jus vitæ et necis*—the power of life and death was entirely in his hand. In dispensing rewards he granted or denied preferment at pleasure: *Whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down*, merely for a humour, and without giving a reason so much as to himself; but it is all *ex mero motu*—of his own good pleasure, and *stat pro ratione voluntas*—his will stands for a reason. Such was the constitution of the eastern monarchies, such the manner of their kings.

(2.) He sets before him the sins which Nebuchadnezzar had been guilty of, whereby he had provoked God against him. [1.] He behaved insultingly towards those that were under him, and grew tyrannical and oppressive. The description given of his power intimates his abuse of his power, and that he was directed in what he did by humour and passion, not by reason and equity; so that he often condemned the innocent and acquitted the guilty, both which are an *abomination to the Lord*. He deposed men of merit and preferred unworthy men, to the great detriment of the public, and for this he was accountable to the most high God, that gave him his power. Note, It is a very hard and rare thing for men to have an absolute arbitrary power, and not to make an ill use of it. Camden has a distich of Giraldus, wherein he speaks of it as a rare instance, concerning our king Henry II. of England, that never any man had so much power and did so little hurt with it.

Glorior hoc uno, quodd nunquam vidimus tñum,  
Nec potuisse magis, nec nocuisse minus—

Of him I can say, exulting, that with the same power to do harm no one was ever more inoffensive.

But that was not all. [2.] He behaved insolently towards the God above him, and grew proud and haughty (v. 20): *His heart was lifted up*, and there his sin and ruin began; his *mind was hardened* in pride, hardened against the commands of God and his judgments; he was wilful and obstinate, and neither the word of God nor his rod made any lasting impression upon him. Note, Pride is a sin that hardens the heart in all other sin and renders the means of repentance and reformation ineffectual.

(3.) He reminds him of the judgments of God that were brought upon him for his pride and obstinacy, how he was deprived of his reason, and so *deposed from his kingly throne* (v. 20), *driven from among men, to dwell with the wild asses*, v. 21. He that would not govern his subjects by rules of reason had not reason sufficient for the government of himself. Note, Justly does God deprive men of their reason when they become unreasonable and will not use it, and of their power when they become oppressive and use it ill. He continued like a brute till he *knew* and embraced that first principle of religion, *That the most high God rules*. And it is rather by religion than reason that man is distinguished from, and dignified above, the beasts; and it is more his honour to be a subject to the supreme Creator than to be lord of the inferior creatures. Note, Kings must know, or shall be made to know, that the most high God rules in their kingdoms (that is an *imperium in imperio*—an empire within an empire, not to be excepted against), and that he appoints over them whomsoever he will. As he makes heirs, so he makes princes.

3. In God's name, he exhibits articles of impeachment against Belshazzar. Before he reads him his doom, from the hand-writing on the wall, he shows him his crime, that God may be *justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges*. Now that which he lays to his charge is, (1.) That he had not taken warning by the judgments of God upon his father (v. 22): *Thou his son, O Belshazzar! hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this*. Note, It is a great offence to God if our hearts be not humbled before him to comply both with his precepts and with his providences, humbled by repentance, obedience, and patience; nay, he expects from the greatest of men that their hearts should be humbled before him, by an acknowledgment that, great as they are, to him they are accountable. And it is a great aggravation of the unhumbleness of our hearts when we know enough to humble them but do not consider and improve it, particularly when we know how others have been broken that would not bend, how others have fallen that would not stoop, and yet we continue stiff and inflexible. It makes the sin of children the more heinous if they tread in the steps of their parents' wickedness, though



they have seen how dearly it has cost them, and how pernicious the consequences of it have been. Do we know this, do we know all this, and yet are we not humbled? (2.) That he had affronted God more impudently than Nebuchadnezzar himself had done, witness the revels of this very night, in the midst of which he was seized with this horror (v. 23): "*Thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven, hast swelled with rage against him, and taken up arms against his crown and dignity, in this particular instance, that thou hast profaned the vessels of his house, and made the utensils of his sanctuary instruments of thy iniquity, and, in an actual designed contempt of him, hast praised the gods of silver and gold, which see not, nor hear, nor know any thing, as if they were to be preferred before the God that sees, and hears, and knows every thing.*" Sinners that are resolved to go on in sin are well enough pleased with gods that *neither see, nor hear, nor know*, for then they may sin securely; but they will find, to their confusion, that though those are the gods they choose those are not the gods they must be judged by, but one to whom *all things are naked and open*. (3.) That he had not answered the end of his creation and maintenance: *The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified*. This is a general charge, which stands good against us all; let us consider how we shall answer it. Observe, [1.] Our dependence upon God as our Creator, preserver, benefactor, owner, and ruler; not only from his hand our breath was at first, but *in his hand our breath is still*; it is he that *holds our souls in life*, and, if he *take away our breath, we die*. Our times being in *his hand*, so is our breath, by which our times are measured. *In him we live, and move, and have our being*; we live by him, live upon him, and cannot live without him. *The way of man is not in himself*, not at his own command, at his own disposal, *but his are all our ways*; for our hearts are in his hand, and so are the hearts of all men, even of kings, who seem to act most as free-agents. [2.] Our duty to God, in consideration of this dependence; we ought to glorify him, to devote ourselves to his honour and employ ourselves in his service, to make it our care to please him and our business to praise him. [3.] Our default in this duty, notwithstanding that dependence; we have not done it; for we have *all sinned, and have come short of the glory of God*. This is the indictment against Belshazzar; there needs no proof, it is made good by the notorious evidence of the fact, and his own conscience cannot but plead guilty to it. And therefore,

4. He now proceeds to read the sentence, as he found it *written upon the wall*: "*Then*" (says Daniel) "*when thou hast come to such a height of impiety as thus to trample upon the most sacred things, then when thou wast*

in the midst of thy sacrilegious idolatrous feast, then was *the part of the hand*, the writing fingers, sent *from him*, from that God whom thou didst so daringly affront, and who had borne so long with thee, but would bear no longer; he *sent them*, and *this writing*, thou now seest, *was written*, v. 24. It is he that now *writes bitter things against thee, and makes thee to possess thy iniquities*," Job xiii. 26. Note, As the sin of sinners is written in the book of God's omniscience, so the doom of sinners is written in the book of God's law; and the day is coming when those *books shall be opened*, and they shall be judged by them. Now the writing was, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, v. 25. It is well that we have an authentic exposition of these words annexed, else we could make little of them, so concise are they; the signification of them is, *He has numbered, he has weighed, and they divide*. The Chaldean wise men, because they knew not that there is but one God only, could not understand who this *He* should be, and for that reason (some think) the writing puzzled them. (1.) *Mene*; that is repeated, for the thing is certain—*Mene, mene*; that signifies, both in Hebrew and Chaldee, *He has numbered and finished*, which Daniel explains thus (v. 26): "*God has numbered thy kingdom, the years and days of the continuance of it; these were numbered in the counsel of God, and now they are finished; the term has expired for and during which thou wast to hold it, and now it must be surrendered*. Here is an end of thy kingdom." (2.) *Tekel*; that signifies, in Chaldee, *Thou art weighed*, and, in Hebrew, *Thou art too light*. So Dr. Lightfoot. For this king and his actions are weighed in the just and unerring balances of divine equity. God does as perfectly know his true character as the goldsmith knows the weight of that which he has weighed in the nicest scales. God does not give judgment against him till he has first pondered his actions, and considered the merits of his case. "*But thou art found wanting, unworthy to have such a trust lodged in thee, a vain, light, empty man, a man of no weight or consideration.*" (3.) *Upharsin*, which should be rendered, and *Pharsin*, or *Peres*. *Parsin*, in Hebrew, signifies the *Persians*; *Paresin*, in Chaldee, signifies *dividing*; Daniel puts both together (v. 28): "*Thy kingdom is divided*, is rent from thee, and *given to the Medes and Persians*, as a prey to be divided among them." Now this may, without any force, be applied to the doom of sinners. *Mene, Tekel, Peres*, may easily be made to signify *death, judgment, and hell*. At death, the sinner's days are *numbered and finished*; after death the judgment, when he will be *weighed in the balance and found wanting*; and after judgment the sinner will be *cut asunder*, and given as a prey to the devil and his angels. Daniel does not here give Belshazzar such

advice and encouragement to repent as he had given Nebuchadnezzar, because he saw the decree had gone forth and he would not be allowed any space to repent.

One would have thought that Belshazzar would be exasperated against Daniel, and, seeing his own case desperate, would be in a rage against him. But he was so far convicted by his own conscience of the reasonableness of all he said that he objected nothing against it; but, on the contrary, gave Daniel the reward he promised him, put on him the *scarlet gown* and the *gold chain*, and proclaimed him the *third ruler in the kingdom* (v. 29), because he would be as good as his word, and because it was not Daniel's fault if the exposition of the hand-writing was not such as he desired. Note, Many show great respect to God's prophets who yet have no regard to his word. Daniel did not value these titles and ensigns of honour, yet would not refuse them, because they were tokens of his prince's good-will: but we have reason to think that he received them with a smile, foreseeing how soon they would all wither with him that bestowed them. They were like Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night and perished in a night, and therefore it was folly for him to be *exceedingly glad* of them.

30 In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. 31 And Darius the Median took the kingdom, *being* about threescore and two years old.

Here is, 1. The death of the king. Reason enough he had to tremble, for he was just falling into the hands of the *king of terrors*, v. 30. In that night, when his heart was merry with wine, the besiegers broke into the city, aimed at the palace; there they found the king, and gave him his death's wound. He could not find any place so secret as to conceal him, or so strong as to protect him. Heathen writers speak of Cyrus's taking Babylon, by surprise, with the assistance of two deserters that showed him the best way into the city. And it was foretold what a consternation it would be to the court, Jer. li. 11, 39. Note, Death comes as a snare upon those whose hearts are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. 2. The transferring of the kingdom into other hands. From the head of gold we now descend to the breast and arms of silver. *Darius the Mede took the kingdom* in partnership with, and by the consent of, Cyrus, who had conquered it, v. 31. They were partners in war and conquest, and so they were in dominion, *ch. vi. 28*. Notice is taken of his age, that he was now sixty-two years old, for which reason Cyrus, who was his nephew, gave him the precedency. Some observe that being now sixty-two years old, in the last year of the captivity, he was born in the eighth year of it, and that was the year when Jeconiah was carried captive and all the no-

bles, &c. See 2 Kings xxiv. 13—15. Just at that time when the most fatal stroke was given was a prince born that in process of time should avenge Jerusalem upon Babylon, and heal the wound that was now given. Thus deep are the counsels of God concerning his people, thus kind are his designs towards them.

#### CHAP. VI.

Daniel does not give a continued history of the reigns in which he lived, nor of the state-affairs of the kingdoms of Chaldaea and Persia, though he was himself a great man in those affairs; for what are those to us? But he selects such particular passages of story as serve for the confirming of our faith in God and the encouraging of our obedience to him, for the things written aforetime were written for our learning. It is a very observable improbable story that we have in this chapter, how Daniel by faith "stopped the mouths of lions," and so "obtained a good report," Heb. xi. 33. The three children were cast into the fiery furnace for not committing a known sin, Daniel was cast into the lions' den for not omitting a known duty, and God's miraculously delivering both them and him is left upon record for the encouragement of his servants in all ages to be resolute and constant both in their abhorrence of that which is evil and in their adherence to that which is good, whatever it cost them. In this chapter we have, I. Daniel's preferment in the court of Darius, ver. 1—3. II. The envy and malice of his enemies against him, ver. 4, 5. III. The decree they obtained against prayer for thirty days, ver. 6—9. IV. Daniel's continuance and constancy in prayer, notwithstanding that decree, ver. 10. V. Information given against him for it, and the casting of him into the den of lions, ver. 11—17. VI. His miraculous preservation in the lions' den, and deliverance out of it, ver. 18—23. VII. The casting of his accusers into the den, and their destruction there, ver. 24. VIII. The decree which Darius made upon this occasion, in honour of the God of Daniel, and the prosperity of Daniel afterwards, ver. 25—28. And this God is our God for ever and ever.

IT pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; 2 And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel *was* first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. 3 Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit *was* in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. 4 Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he *was* faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God.

We are here told concerning Daniel,

I. What a *great man* he was. When Darius, upon his accession to the crown of Babylon by conquest, new-modelled the government, he made Daniel prime-minister of state, set him at the helm, and made him first commissioner both of the treasury and of the great seal. Darius's dominion was very large; all he got by his conquests and acquisitions was that he had so many more countries to take care of; no more can be expected from himself than what one man



can do, and therefore others must be employed under him. He *set over the kingdom* 120 *princes* (v. 1), and appointed them their districts, in which they were to administer justice, preserve the public peace, and levy the king's revenue. Note, Inferior magistrates are ministers of God to us for good as well as the sovereign; and therefore we must submit ourselves both to the king as supreme and to the governors that are constituted and commissioned by him, 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. Over these princes there was a *triumvirate*, or *three presidents*, who were to take and state the public accounts, to receive appeals from the princes, or complaints against them in case of mal-administration, *that the king should have no damage* (v. 2), that he should not sustain loss in his revenue and that the power he delegated to the princes might not be abused to the oppression of the subject, for by that the king (whether he thinks so or no) receives real damage, both as it alienates the affections of his people from him and as it provokes the displeasure of his God against him. Of these three Daniel was the chief, because he was found to go beyond them all in all manner of princely qualifications. He was *preferred above the presidents and princes* (v. 3), and so wonderfully well pleased the king was with his management that *he thought to set him over the whole realm*, and let him place and displace at his pleasure. Now, 1. We must take notice of it to the praise of Darius that he would prefer a man thus purely for his personal merit, and his fitness for business; and those sovereigns that would be well served must go by that rule. Daniel had been a great man in the kingdom that was conquered, and for that reason, one would think, should have been looked upon as an enemy, and as such imprisoned or banished. He was a native of a foreign kingdom, and a ruined one, and upon that account might have been despised as a stranger and captive. But Darius, it seems, was very quick-sighted in judging of men's capacities, and was soon aware that this Daniel had something extraordinary in him, and therefore, though no doubt he had creatures of his own, not a few, that expected preferment in this newly-conquered kingdom, and were gaping for it, and those that had been long his confidants would depend upon it that they should be now his presidents, yet so well did he consult the public welfare that, finding Daniel to excel them all in prudence and virtue, and probably having heard of his being divinely inspired, he made him his right hand. 2. We must take notice of it, to the glory of God, that, though Daniel was now very old (it was above seventy years since he was brought a captive to Babylon), yet he was as able as ever for business both in body and mind, and that he who had continued faithful to his religion through all the temptations of the foregoing reigns in a new government

was as much respected as ever. He kept in by being an oak, not by being a willow, by a constancy in virtue, not by a pliability to vice. Such honesty is the best policy, for it secures a reputation; and those who thus honour God he will honour.

II. What a good man he was: *An excellent spirit was in him*, v. 3. And he was faithful to every trust, dealt fairly between the sovereign and the subject, and took care that neither should be wronged, so that there was *no error, or fault, to be found in him*, v. 4. He was not only not chargeable with any treachery or dishonesty, but not even with any mistake or indiscretion. He never made any blunder, nor had any occasion to plead inadvertency or forgetfulness for his excuse. This is recorded for an example to all that are in places of public trust to approve themselves both careful and conscientious, that they may be free, not only from fault, but from error, not only from crime, but from mistake.

III. What ill-will was borne him, both for his greatness and for his goodness. The presidents and princes envied him because he was advanced above them, and probably hated him because he had a watchful eye upon them and took care they should not wrong the government to enrich themselves. See here, 1. The cause of envy, and that is every thing that is good. Solomon complains of it as a vexation that *for every right work a man is envied of his neighbour* (Eccl. iv. 4), that the better a man is the worse he is thought of by his rivals. Daniel is envied because he has a more excellent spirit than his neighbours. 2. The effect of envy, and that is every thing that is bad. Those that envied Daniel sought no less than his ruin. His disgrace would not serve them; it was his death that they desired. *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who can stand before envy?* Prov. xxvii. 4. Daniel's enemies set spies upon him, to observe him in the management of his place; they *sought to find occasion against him*, something on which to ground an accusation *concerning the kingdom*, some instance of neglect or partiality, some hasty word spoken, some person borne hard upon, or some necessary business overlooked. And if they could but have found the mote, the mole-hill, of a mistake, it would have been soon improved to the beam, to the mountain, of an unpardonable misdemeanour. But *they could find no occasion against him*; they owned that they could not. Daniel always acted honestly, and now the more warily, and stood the more upon his guard, *because of his observers*, Ps. xxvii. 11. Note, We have all need to walk circumspectly, because we have many eyes upon us, and some that watch for our halting. Those especially have need to carry their cup even that have it full. They concluded, at length, that they should not find any occasion against him except *concerning the law of his God* v. 5. It seems then that

Daniel kept up the profession of his religion, and held it fast without wavering or shrinking, and yet that was no bar to his preferment; there was no law that required him to be of the king's religion, or incapacitated him to bear office in the state unless he were. It was all one to the king what God he prayed to, so long as he did the business of his place faithfully and well. He was at the king's service *usque ad aras*—as far as the altars; but there he left him. In this matter therefore his enemies hoped to ensnare him. *Quærendum est crimen læsæ religionis ubi majestatis deficit*—When treason could not be charged upon him he was accused of impiety. Grotius. Note, It is an excellent thing, and much for the glory of God, when those who profess religion conduct themselves so inoffensively in their whole conversation that their most watchful spiteful enemies may find no occasion of blaming them, save only in the matters of their God, in which they walk according to their consciences. It is observable that, when Daniel's enemies could find no occasion against him concerning the kingdom, they had so much sense of justice left that they did not suborn witnesses against him to accuse him of crimes he was innocent of, and to swear treason upon him, wherein they shame many that were called Jews and are called Christians.

6 Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. 7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. 9 Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. 10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Daniel's adversaries could have no advantage against him from any law now in being; they therefore contrive a new law, by which they hope to ensnare him, and in a matter in which they knew they should be sure of

him; and such was his fidelity to his God that they gained their point. Here is,

I. Darius's impious law. I call it *Darius's*, because he gave the royal assent to it, and otherwise it would not have been of force; but it was not properly his: he contrived it not, and was perfectly wheedled to consent to it. The presidents and princes framed the edict, brought in the bill, and by their management it was agreed to by the convention of the states, who perhaps were met at this time upon some public occasion. It is pretended that this bill which they would have to pass into a law was the result of mature deliberation, that all the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, princes, counsellors, and captains, had consulted together about it, and that they not only agreed to it, but advised it, for *divers good causes and considerations*, that they had done what they could to establish it for a firm decree; nay, they intimate to the king that it was carried *nemine contradicente*—unanimously: "*All the presidents are of this mind*;" and yet we are sure that Daniel, the chief of the three presidents, did not agree to it, and have reason to think that many more of the princes excepted against it as absurd and unreasonable. Note, It is no new thing for that to be represented, and with great assurance too, as the sense of the nation, which is far from being so; and that which few approve of is sometimes confidently said to be that which all agree to. But, O the infelicity of kings, who, being under a necessity of seeing and hearing with other people's eyes and ears, are often wretchedly imposed upon! These designing men, under colour of doing honour to the king, but really intending the ruin of his favourite, press him to pass this into a law, and make it a royal statute, that *whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king, shall be put to death* after the most barbarous manner, shall be cast into the den of lions, &c. 7. This is the bill they have been hatching, and they lay it before the king to be signed and passed into a law. Now, 1. There is nothing in it that has the least appearance of good, but that it magnifies the king, and makes him seem both very great and very kind to his subjects, which, they suggest, will be of good service to him now that he has newly come to his throne, and will confirm his interests. All men must be made to believe that the king is so rich, and withal so ready to all petitioners, that none in any want or distress need to apply either to God or man for relief, but to him only. And for thirty days together he will be ready to give audience to all that have any petition to present to him. It is indeed much for the honour of kings to be benefactors to their subjects and to have their ears open to their complaints and requests; but if they pretend to be their sole benefactors, and undertake to be to them instead of God, and challenge



that respect from them which is due to God only, it is their disgrace, and not their honour. But, 2. There is a great deal in it that is apparently evil. It is bad enough to forbid asking a petition of any man. Must not a beggar ask an alms, or one neighbour beg a kindness of another? If the child want bread, must he not ask it of his parents, or be cast into the den of lions if he do? Nay, those that have business with the king, may they not petition those about him to introduce them? But it was much worse, and an impudent affront to all religion, to forbid asking a petition of any god. It is by prayer that we give glory to God, fetch in mercy from God, and so keep up our communion with God; and to interdict prayer for thirty days is for so long to rob God of all the tribute he has from man and to rob man of all the comfort he has in God. When the light of nature teaches us that the providence of God has the ordering and disposing of all our affairs does not the law of nature oblige us by prayer to acknowledge God and seek to him? Does not every man's heart direct him, when he is in want or distress, to call upon God, and must this be made high treason? We could not live a day without God; and can men live thirty days without prayer? Will the king himself be tied up for so long from praying to God; or, if it be allowed him, will he undertake to do it for all his subjects? Did ever any nation thus slight their gods? But see what absurdities malice will drive men to. Rather than not bring Daniel into trouble for praying to his God, they will deny themselves and all their friends the satisfaction of praying to theirs. Had they proposed only to prohibit the Jews from praying to their God, Daniel would have been as effectually ensnared; but they knew the king would not pass such a law, and therefore made it thus general. And the king, puffed up with a fancy that this would set him up as a little god, was fond of the feather in his cap (for so it was, and not a flower in his crown) and signed the writing and the decree (v. 9), which, being once done, according to the constitution of the united kingdom of the Medes and Persians, was not upon any pretence whatsoever to be altered or dispensed with, or the breach of it pardoned.

II. Daniel's pious disobedience to this law, v. 10. He did not retire into the country, nor abscond for some time, though he knew the law was levelled against him; but, because he knew it was so, therefore he stood his ground, knowing that he had now a fair opportunity of honouring God before men, and showing that he preferred his favour, and his duty to him, before life itself. When Daniel knew that the writing was signed he might have gone to the king, and expostulated with him about it; nay, he might have remonstrated against it, as grounded upon a misinformation that all the presidents had

consented to it, whereas he that was chief of them had never been consulted about it: but he went to his house, and applied himself to his duty, cheerfully trusting God with the event. Now observe,

1. Daniel's constant practice, which we were not informed of before this occasion, but which we have reason to think was the general practice of the pious Jews. (1.) He prayed in his house, sometimes himself alone and sometimes with his family about him, and made a solemn business of it. Cornelius was a man that prayed in his house, Acts x. 30. Note, Every house not only may be, but ought to be, a house of prayer; where we have a tent God must have an altar, and on it we must offer spiritual sacrifices. (2.) In every prayer he gave thanks. When we pray to God for the mercies we want we must praise him for those we have received. Thanksgiving must be a part of every prayer. (3.) In his prayer and thanksgiving he had an eye to God as his God, his in covenant and set himself as in his presence. He did this before his God, and with a regard to him. (4.) When he prayed and gave thanks he kneeled upon his knees, which is the most proper gesture in prayer, and most expressive of humility, and reverence, and submission to God. Kneeling is a begging posture, and we come to God as beggars, beggars for our lives, whom it concerns to be importunate. (5.) He opened the windows of his chamber, that the sight of the visible heavens might affect his heart with an awe of that God who dwells above the heavens; but that was not all: he opened them towards Jerusalem, the holy city, though now in ruins, to signify the affection he had for its very stones and dust (Ps. cii. 14) and the remembrance he had of its concerns daily in his prayers. Thus, though he himself lived great in Babylon, yet he testified his concurrence with the meanest of his brethren the captives, in remembering Jerusalem and preferring it before his chief joy, Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6. Jerusalem was the place which God had chosen to put his name there; and, when the temple was dedicated, Solomon's prayer to God was that if his people should in the land of their enemies pray unto him with their eye towards the land which he gave them, and the city he had chosen, and the house which was built to his name, then he would hear and maintain their cause (1 Kings viii. 48, 49), to which prayer Daniel had reference in this circumstance of his devotions. (6.) He did this three times a day, three times every day according to the example of David (Ps. lv. 17), Morning, evening, and at noon, I will pray. It is good to have our hours of prayer, not to bind, but to remind conscience; and, if we think our bodies require refreshment by food thrice a day, can we think seldomer will serve our souls? This is surely as little as may be to answer the command of praying always. (7.) He

did this so openly and avowedly that all who knew him knew it to be his practice; and he thus showed it, not because he was proud of it (in the place where he was there was no room for that temptation, for it was not reputation, but reproach, that attended it), but because he was not ashamed of it. Though Daniel was a great man, he did not think it below him to be thrice a day upon his knees before his Maker and to be his own chaplain; though he was an old man, he did not think himself past it; nor, though it had been his practice from his youth up, was he weary of this well doing. Though he was a man of business, vast business, for the service of the public, he did not think that would excuse him from the daily exercises of devotion. How inexcusable then are those who have but little to do in the world, and yet will not do thus much for God and their souls! Daniel was a man famous for prayer, and for success in it (Ezek. xiv. 14), and he came to be so by thus making a conscience of prayer and making a business of it daily; and in thus doing God blessed him wonderfully.

2. Daniel's constant adherence to this practice, even when it was made by the law a capital crime. When he knew that *the writing was signed* he continued to do *as he did aforetime*, and altered not one circumstance of the performance. Many a man, yea, and many a good man, would have thought it prudence to omit it for these thirty days, when he could not do it without hazard of his life; he might have prayed so much the oftener when those days had expired and the danger was over, or he might have performed the duty at another time, and in another place, so secretly that it should not be possible for his enemies to discover it; and so he might both satisfy his conscience and keep up his communion with God, and yet avoid the law, and continue in his usefulness. But, if he had done so, it would have been thought, both by his friends and by his enemies, that he had thrown up the duty for this time, through cowardice and base fear, which would have tended very much to the dishonour of God and the discouragement of his friends. Others who moved in a lower sphere might well enough act with caution; but Daniel, who had so many eyes upon him, must act with courage; and the rather because he knew that the law, when it was made, was particularly levelled against him. Note, We must not omit duty for fear of suffering, no, nor so much as *seem to come short of it*. In trying times great stress is laid upon our *confessing Christ before men* (Matt. x. 32), and we must take heed lest, under pretence of discretion, we be found guilty of cowardice in the cause of God. If we do not think that this example of Daniel obliges us to do likewise, yet I am sure it forbids us to censure those that do, for God owned him in it. By his

constancy to his duty it now appears that he had never been used to admit any excuse for the omission of it; for, if ever any excuse would serve to put it by, this would have served now, (1.) That it was forbidden by the king his master, and in honour of the king too; but it is an undoubted maxim, in answer to that, We are to obey God rather than men. (2.) That it would be the loss of his life, but it is an undoubted maxim, in answer to that, Those who throw away their souls (as those certainly do that live without prayer) to save their lives make but a bad bargain for themselves; and though herein they make themselves, like the king of Tyre, *wiser than Daniel*, at their end they will be fools.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. 12 Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask *a petition* of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. 13 Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which *is* of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. 14 Then the king, when he heard *these* words, was sore displeased with himself, and set *his* heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians *is*, that no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. 16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. *Now* the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. 17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.



Here is, 1. Proof made of Daniel's praying to his God, notwithstanding the late edict to the contrary (v. 11): *These men assembled; they came tumultuously together*, so the word is, the same that was used v. 6, borrowed from Ps. ii. 1, *Why do the heathen rage?* They came together to visit Daniel, perhaps under pretence of business, at that time which they knew to be his usual hour of devotion; and, if they had not found him so engaged, they would have upbraided him with his faint-heartedness and distrust of his God, but (which they rather wished to do) *they found him on his knees praying and making supplication before his God. For his love they are his adversaries*; but, like his father David, *he gives himself unto prayer*, Ps. cix. 4. 2. Complaint made of it to the king. When they had found occasion against Daniel concerning *the law of his God* they lost no time, but applied to the king (v. 12), and having appealed to him whether there was not such a law made, and gained from him a recognition of it, and that it was so ratified that it might not be altered, they proceeded to accuse Daniel, v. 13. They so describe him, in the information they give, as to exasperate the king and incense him the more against him: "*He is of the children of the captivity of Judah; he is of Judah, that despicable people, and now a captive in a despicable state, that can call nothing his own but what he has by the king's favour, and yet he regards not thee, O king! nor the decree that thou hast signed.*" Note, It is no new thing for that which is done faithfully, in conscience towards God, to be misrepresented as done obstinately and in contempt of the civil powers, that is, for the best saints to be reproached as the worst men. Daniel regarded God, and therefore prayed, and we have reason to think prayed for the king and his government, yet this is construed as not regarding the king. That excellent spirit which Daniel was endued with, and that established reputation which he had gained, could not protect him from these poisonous darts. They do not say, He makes his petition to his God, lest Darius should take notice of that to his praise, but only, *He makes his petition*, which is the thing the law forbids. 3. The great concern the king was in hereupon. He now perceived that, whatever they pretended, it was not to honour him, but in spite to Daniel, that they had proposed that law, and now he is *sorely displeased with himself* for gratifying them in it, v. 14. Note, When men indulge a proud vain-glorious humour, and please themselves with that which feeds it, they know not what vexations they are preparing for themselves; their flatterers may prove their tormentors, and are but *spreading a net for their feet*. Now the king *sets his heart to deliver Daniel*; both by argument and by authority he labours till the *going down of the sun to deliver him*, that is,

to persuade his accusers not to insist upon his prosecution. Note, We often do that, through inconsideration, which afterwards we see cause a thousand times to wish undone again, which is a good reason why we should *ponder the path of our feet*, for then *all our ways will be established*. 4. The violence with which the prosecutors demanded judgment, v. 15. We are not told what Daniel said; the king himself is his advocate, he needs not plead his own cause, but silently commits himself and it to him that judges righteously. But the prosecutors insist upon it that the law must have its course; it is a fundamental maxim in the constitution of the government of the Medes and Persians, which had now become the universal monarchy, that *no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed*. The same we find Esth. i. 19; viii. 8. The Chaldeans magnified the will of their king, by giving him a power to make and unmake laws at his pleasure, to slay and keep alive whom he would. The Persians magnified the wisdom of their king, by supposing that whatever law he solemnly ratified it was so well made that there could be no occasion to alter it, or dispense with it, as if any human foresight could, in framing a law, guard against all inconveniences. But, if this maxim be duly applied to Daniel's case (as I am apt to think it is not, but perverted), while it honours the king's legislative power it hampers his executive power, and incapacitates him to show that mercy which upholds the throne, and to pass acts of indemnity, which are the glories of a reign. Those who allow not the sovereign's power to dispense with a disabling statute, yet never question his power to pardon an offence against a penal statute. But Darius is denied this power. See what need we have to pray for princes that God would give them wisdom, for they are often embarrassed with great difficulties, even the wisest and best are. 5. The executing of the law upon Daniel. The king himself, with the utmost reluctance, and against his conscience, signs the warrant for his execution; and Daniel, that venerable grave man, who carried such a mixture of majesty and sweetness in his countenance, who had so often looked great upon the bench, and at the council-board, and greater upon his knees, who had power with God and man, and had prevailed, is brought, purely for worshipping his God, as if he had been one of the vilest of malefactors, and *thrown into the den of lions*, to be devoured by them, v. 16. One cannot think of it without the utmost compassion to the gracious sufferer and the utmost indignation at the malicious prosecutors. To make sure work, the stone *laid upon the mouth of the den is sealed*, and the king (an over-easy man) is persuaded to seal it *with his own signet* (v. 17), that unhappy signet with which he had confirmed



the law that Daniel falls by. But his lords cannot trust him, unless they add their signets too. Thus, when Christ was buried, his adversaries *sealed the stone* that was rolled to the door of his sepulchre. 6. The encouragement which Darius gave to Daniel to trust in God: *Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee*, v. 16. Here, (1.) He justifies Daniel from guilt, owning all his crime to be serving his God continually, and continuing to do so even when it was made a crime. (2.) He leaves it to God to free him from punishment, since he could not prevail to do it: *He will deliver thee*. He is sure that his God can deliver him, for he believes him to be an almighty God, and he has reason to think he will do it, having heard of his delivering Daniel's companions in a like case from the fiery furnace, and concluding him to be always faithful to those who approve themselves faithful to him. Note, Those who serve God continually he will continually preserve, and will bear them out in his service.

18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?* 21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. 22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. 23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God. 24 And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

Here is, I. The melancholy night which the king had, upon Daniel's account, v. 18. He had said, indeed, that God would deliver him out of the danger, but at the same time he could not forgive himself for throwing him into the danger; and justly might God deprive him of a friend whom he had himself used so barbarously. He *went to his palace*, vexed at himself for what he had done, and calling himself unwise and unjust for not adhering to the law of God and nature, with a *non obstante*—a *negative* to the law of the Medes and Persians. He ate no supper, but *passed the night fasting*; his heart was already full of grief and fear. He forbade the music; nothing is more unpleasant than songs sung to a heavy heart. He went to bed, but got no sleep, was full of *tossings to and fro* till the dawning of the day. Note, The best way to have a good night is to keep a good conscience, then we may lie down in peace.

II. The solicitous enquiry he made concerning Daniel the next morning, v. 19, 20. He was up early, *very early*; for how could he lie in bed when he could not sleep for dreaming of Daniel, nor lie awake quietly for thinking of him? And he was no sooner up than he *went in haste to the den of lions*, for he could not satisfy himself to send a servant (that would not sufficiently testify his affection for Daniel), nor had he patience to stay so long as till a servant would return. When he comes to the den, not without some hopes that God had graciously undone what he had wickedly done, he cries, *with a lamentable voice*, as one full of concern and trouble, *O Daniel! art thou alive?* He longs to know, yet trembles to ask the question, fearing to be answered with the roaring of the lions after more prey: *O Daniel! servant of the living God, has thy God whom thou servest made it to appear that he is able to deliver thee from the lions?* If he rightly understood himself when he called him *the living God*, he could not doubt of his ability to keep Daniel alive, for he that has life in himself quickens whom he will; but has he thought fit in this case to exert his power? What he doubted of we are sure of, that the *servants of the living God* have a Master who is well able to protect them and bear them out in his service.

III. The joyful news he meets with—that Daniel is alive, is safe, and well, and unhurt in the lions' den, v. 21, 22. Daniel knew the king's voice, though it was now a lamentable voice, and spoke to him with all the deference and respect that were due to him: *O king! live for ever*. He does not reproach him for his unkindness to him, and his easiness in yielding to the malice of his persecutors; but, to show that he has heartily forgiven him, he meets him with his good wishes. Note, We should not upbraid those with the diskindnesses they have done us who we know, did them with reluctance,



and are very ready to upbraid themselves with them. The account Daniel gives the king is very pleasant; it is triumphant. 1. God has preserved his life by a miracle. Darius had called him Daniel's God (*thy God whom thou servest*), to which Daniel does as it were echo back, Yea, he is *my God*, whom I own, and who owns me, for *he has sent his angel*. The same bright and glorious being that was seen in *the form of the Son of God* with the three children in the fiery furnace had visited Daniel, and, it is likely, in a visible appearance had enlightened the dark den, and kept Daniel company all night, and had *shut the lions' mouths*, that they had not in the least hurt him. The angel's presence made even the lions' den his strong-hold, his palace, his paradise; he had never had a better night in his life. See the power of God over the fiercest creatures, and believe his power to restrain the roaring lion that *goes about continually seeking to devour* from hurting those that are his. See the care God takes of his faithful worshippers, especially when he calls them out to suffer for him. If he keeps their souls from sin, comforts their souls with his peace, and receives their souls to himself, he does in effect *stop the lions' mouths*, that they cannot hurt them. See how ready the angels are to minister for the good of God's people, for they own themselves their *fellow servants*. 2. God has therein pleaded his cause. He was represented to the king as disaffected to him and his government. We do not find that he said any thing in his own vindication, but left it to God to clear up his integrity as the light; and he did it effectually, by working a miracle for his preservation. Daniel, in what he had done, had not offended either God or the king: *Before him whom I prayed to innocency was found in me*. He pretends not to a meritorious excellence, but the testimony of his conscience concerning his sincerity is his comfort—*As also that before thee, O king! I have done no hurt*, nor designed thee any affront.

IV. The discharge of Daniel from his confinement. His prosecutors cannot but own that the law is satisfied, though they are not, or, if it be altered, it is by a power superior to that of the Medes and Persians; and therefore no cause can be shown why Daniel should not be fetched out of the den (*v. 23*): *The king was exceedingly glad* to find him alive, and gave orders immediately that they should *take him out of the den*, as Jeremiah out of the dungeon; and, when they searched, *no manner of hurt was found upon him*; he was nowhere crushed nor scarred, but was kept perfectly well, *because he believed in his God*. Note, Those who boldly and cheerfully trust in God to protect them in the way of their duty shall never be made ashamed of their confidence in him, but shall always find him a present help.

V. The committing of his prosecutors to the same prison, or place of execution rather, *v. 24*. Darius is animated by this miracle wrought for Daniel, and now begins to take courage and act like himself. Those that would not suffer him to show mercy to Daniel shall, now that God has done it for him, be made to feel his resentments; and he will do justice for God who had shown mercy for him. Daniel's accusers, now that his innocency is cleared, and Heaven itself has become his compurgator, have the same punishment inflicted upon them which they designed against him, according to the law of retaliation made against false accusers, Deut. xix. 18, 19. Such they were to be reckoned now that Daniel was proved innocent; for, though the fact was true, yet it was not a fault. They were *cast into the den of lions*, which perhaps was a punishment newly invented by themselves; however, it was what they maliciously designed for Daniel. *Nec lex est justior ulla quam necis artifices arte perire sud*—No law can be more just than that which adjudges the devisers of barbarity to perish by it, Ps. vii. 15, 16; ix. 15, 16. And now Solomon's observation is verified (Prov. xi. 8), *The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead*. In this execution we may observe, 1. The king's severity, in ordering their wives and children to be thrown to the lions with them. How righteous are God's statutes above those of the nations! For God commanded that the children should not die for the fathers' crimes, Deut. xxiv. 16. Yet they were put to death in extraordinary cases, as those of Achan, and Saul, and Haman. 2. The lions' fierceness. They had the mastery of them immediately, and tore them to pieces *before they came to the bottom of the den*. This verified and magnified the miracle of their sparing Daniel; for hereby it appeared that it was not because they had not appetite, but because they had not leave. Mastiffs that are kept muzzled are the more fierce when the muzzle is taken off; so were these lions. And the Lord is known by those judgments which he executes.

25 Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. 26 I make a decree, that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he *is* the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion *shall be even* unto the end. 27 He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power

of the lions. 28 So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Darius here studies to make some amends for the dishonour he had done both to God and Daniel, in casting Daniel into the lions' den, by doing honour to both.

I. He gives honour to God by a decree published to all nations, by which they are required to fear before him. And this is a decree which is indeed fit to be made unalterable, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, for it is the *everlasting gospel*, preached to those that *dwell on the earth*, Rev. xiv. 7. *Fear God, and give glory to him*. Observe, 1. To whom he sends this decree—to all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth, v. 25. These are great words, and it is true that all the inhabitants of the earth are obliged to that which is here decreed; but here they mean no more than *every dominion of his kingdom*, which, though it contained many nations, did not contain all nations; but so it is, those that have much are ready to think they have all.

2. What the matter of the decree is—that *men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel*. This goes further than Nebuchadnezzar's decree upon a similar occasion, for that only restrained people from *speaking amiss* of this God, but this requires them to *fear before him*, to keep up and express awful reverent thoughts of him. And well might this decree be prefaced, as it is, with *Peace be multiplied unto you*, for the only foundation of true and abundant peace is laid in the fear of God, for that is true wisdom. If we live in the fear of God, and walk according to that rule, peace shall be upon us, peace shall be multiplied to us. But, though this decree goes far, it does not go far enough; had he done right, and come up to his present convictions, he would have commanded all men not only to tremble and fear before this God, but to love him and trust in him, to forsake the service of their idols, and to worship him only, and call upon him as Daniel did. But idolatry had been so long and so deeply rooted that it was not to be extirpated by the edicts of princes, nor by any power less than that which went along with the glorious gospel of Christ.

3. What are the causes and considerations moving him to make this decree. They are sufficient to have justified a decree for the total suppression of idolatry, much more will they serve to support this. There is good reason why all men should fear before this God, for, (1.) His being is transcendent. "He is the *living God*, lives as a God, whereas the gods we worship are dead things, have not so much as an animal life." (2.) His government is incontestable. He has a *kingdom*, and a *dominion*; he not only lives, but reigns as an absolute sovereign. (3.) Both his being and his government are

unchangeable. He is himself *steadfast for ever*, and with him is no shadow of turning. And his *kingdom* too is *that which shall not be destroyed* by any external force, nor has his *dominion* any thing in itself that threatens a decay or tends towards it, and therefore it shall be *even to the end*. (4.) He has an ability sufficient to support such an authority, v. 27. He delivers his faithful servants from trouble and rescues them out of trouble; he *works signs and wonders*, quite above the utmost power of nature to effect, both *in heaven and on earth*, by which it appears that he is sovereign Lord of both. (5.) He has given a fresh proof of all this in *delivering* his servant *Daniel from the power of the lions*. This miracle, and that of the delivering of the three children, were wrought in the eyes of the world, were seen, published, and attested by two of the greatest monarchs that ever were, and were illustrious confirmations of the first principles of religion, abstracted from the narrow scheme of Judaism, effectual confutations of all the errors of heathenism, and very proper preparations for pure catholic Christianity.

II. He puts honour upon Daniel (v. 28): *So this Daniel prospered*. See how God brought to him good out of evil. This bold stroke which his enemies made at his life was a happy occasion of taking them off, and their children too, who otherwise would still have stood in the way of his preferment, and have been upon all occasions vexatious to him; and now he *prospered more than ever*, was more in favour with his prince and in reputation with the people, which gave him a great opportunity of doing good to his brethren. Thus *out of the eater* (and that was a lion too) *came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*.

#### CHAP. VII.

The six former chapters of this book were historical; we now enter with fear and trembling upon the six latter, which are prophetic, wherein are many things dark and hard to be understood, which we dare not positively determine the sense of, and yet many things plain and profitable, which I trust God will enable us to make a good use of. In this chapter we have, I. Daniel's vision of the four beasts, ver. 1—8. II. His vision of God's throne of government and judgment, ver. 9—14. III. The interpretation of these visions, given him by an angel that stood by, ver. 15—28. Whether those visions look as far forward as the end of time, or whether they were to have a speedy accomplishment, is hard to say, nor are the most judicious interpreters agreed concerning it.

IN the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, *and* told the sum of the matters. 2 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. 4 The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted



up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. 5 And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and *it had* three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. 6 After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it *was* diverse from all the beasts that *were* before it; and it had ten horns. 8 I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn *were* eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The date of this chapter places it before *ch. v.*, which was in the last year of Belshazzar, and *ch. vi.*, which was in the first of Darius; for Daniel had those visions in the first year of Belshazzar, when the captivity of the Jews in Babylon was drawing near a period. Belshazzar's name here is, in the original, spelt differently from what it used to be; before it was *Bel-she-azar*—*Bel is he that treasures up riches*. But this is *Bel-eshe-zar*—*Bel is on fire by the enemy*. Bel was the god of the Chaldeans; he had prospered, but is now to be consumed.

We have, in these verses, Daniel's vision of the four monarchies that were oppressive to the Jews. Observe,

I. The circumstances of this vision. Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and now he is himself honoured with similar divine discoveries (*v. 1*): He *had visions of his head upon his bed*, when he was asleep; so God sometimes revealed himself and his mind to the children of men, when deep sleep fell upon them (*Job xxxiii. 15*); for when we are most retired from the world, and taken off from the things of sense, we are most fit for communion with God. But when he was awake he *wrote the dream* for his own use, lest he should forget it as a dream which passes away; and he *told the sum of the matters* to his brethren the Jews for their use, and gave it to them in writing,

that it might be communicated to those at a distance and preserved for their children after them, who shall see these things accomplished. The Jews, misunderstanding some of the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, flattered themselves with hopes that, after their return to their own land, they should enjoy a complete and uninterrupted tranquillity; but that they might not so deceive themselves, and their calamities be made doubly grievous by the disappointment, God by this prophet lets them know that they shall have tribulation: those promises of their prosperity were to be accomplished in the spiritual blessings of the kingdom of grace; as Christ has told his disciples they must expect persecution, and the promises they depend upon will be accomplished in the eternal blessings of the kingdom of glory. Daniel both wrote these things and spoke them, to intimate that the church should be taught both by the scriptures and by ministers' preaching, both by the written word and by word of mouth; and ministers in their preaching are to *tell the sum of the matters* that are written.

II. The vision itself, which foretels the revolutions of government in those nations which the church of the Jews, for the following ages, was to be under the influence of. 1. He observed the *four winds to strive upon the great sea, v. 2*. They strove which should blow strongest, and, at length, blow alone. This represents the contests among princes for empire, and the shakings of the nations by these contests, to which those mighty monarchies, which he was now to have a prospect of, owed their rise. One wind from any point of the compass, if it blow hard, will cause a great commotion in the sea; but what a tumult must needs be raised when the four winds strive for mastery! That is it which the kings of the nations are contending for in their wars, which are as noisy and violent as the battle of the winds; but how is the poor sea tossed and torn, how terrible are its concussions, how violent its convulsions, while the winds are at strife which shall have the sole power of troubling it! Note, 'This world is like a stormy tempestuous sea; thanks to the proud ambitious winds that vex it. 2. He saw *four great beasts come up from the sea, from the troubled waters*, in which aspiring minds love to fish. The monarchs and monarchies are represented by *beasts*, because too often it is by brutish rage and tyranny that they are raised and supported. These beasts were *diverse one from another (v. 3)*, of different shapes, to denote the different genius and complexion of the nations in whose hands they were lodged. (1.) *The first beast was like a lion, v. 4*. This was the Chaldean monarchy, that was fierce and strong, and made the kings absolute. This lion had *eagle's wings*, with which to fly upon the prey, denoting the wonderful speed that

Nebuchadnezzar made in his conquest of kingdoms. But Daniel soon sees the *wings plucked*, a full stop put to the career of their victorious arms. Divers countries that had been tributaries to them revolt from them, and make head against them; so that this monstrous animal, this winged lion, is made to *stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart is given to it*. It has lost the heart of a lion, which it had been famous for (one of our English kings was called *Cœur de Lion*—*Lion-heart*), has lost its courage and become feeble and faint, dreading every thing and daring nothing; they are put in fear, and made to know themselves to be but men. Sometimes the valour of a nation strangely sinks, and it becomes cowardly and effeminate, so that what was the head of the nations in an age or two becomes the tail. (2.) The *second* beast was *like a bear*, v. 5. This was the Persian monarchy, less strong and generous than the former, but no less ravenous. This bear *raised up itself on one side* against the lion, and soon mastered it. It *raised up one dominion*; so some read it. Persia and Media, which in Nebuchadnezzar's image were the *two arms* in one breast, now set up a joint government. This bear had *three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth*, the remains of those nations it had devoured, which were the marks of its voraciousness, and yet an indication that though it had devoured much it could not devour all; some ribs still stuck in the teeth of it, which it could not conquer. Whereupon it was said to it, "*Arise, devour much flesh*"; let alone the bones, the ribs, that cannot be conquered, and set upon that which will be an easier prey." The princes will stir up both the kings and the people to push on their conquests, and let nothing stand before them. Note, Conquests, unjustly made, are but like those of the beasts of prey, and in *this* much worse, that the beasts prey not upon those of their own kind, as wicked and unreasonable men do. (3.) The third beast was *like a leopard*, v. 6. This was the Grecian monarchy, founded by *Alexander the Great*, active, crafty, and cruel, like a leopard. He had *four wings of a fowl*; the lion seems to have had but two wings, but the leopard had four, for though Nebuchadnezzar made great despatch in his conquests Alexander made much greater. In six years' time he gained the whole empire of Persia, a great part besides of Asia, made himself master of Syria, Egypt, India, and other nations. This beast had *four heads*; upon Alexander's death his conquests were divided among his four chief captains; Seleucus Nicanor had Asia the Great; Perdiccas, and after him Antigonus, had Asia the Less; Cassander had Macedonia; and Ptolemus had Egypt. *Dominion was given to this beast*; it was given of God, from whom alone promotion comes. (4.) The fourth beast was more fierce, and formidable, and mischievous,

than any of them, unlike any of the other, nor is there any among the beasts of prey to which it might be compared, v. 7. The learned are not agreed concerning this anonymous beast; some make it to be the Roman empire, which, when it was in its glory, comprehended ten kingdoms, Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Britain, Sarmatia, Pannonia, Asia, Greece, and Egypt; and then the little horn which rose by the fall of three of the other horns (v. 8) they make to be the Turkish empire, which rose in the room of Asia, Greece, and Egypt. Others make this fourth beast to be the kingdom of Syria, the family of the Seleucidae, which was very cruel and oppressive to the people of the Jews, as we find in Josephus and the history of the Maccabees. And herein that empire was diverse from those which went before, that none of the preceding powers compelled the Jews to renounce their religion, but the kings of Syria did, and used them barbarously. Their armies and commanders were the *great iron teeth* with which they *devoured and broke in pieces* the people of God, and they *trampled upon the residue* of them. The *ten horns* are then supposed to be ten kings that reigned successively in Syria; and then the *little horn* is Antiochus Epiphanes, the last of the ten, who by one means or other undermined three of the kings, and got the government. He was a man of great ingenuity, and therefore is said to have eyes *like the eyes of a man*; and he was very bold and daring, had a *mouth speaking great things*. We shall meet with him again in these prophecies.

9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, and his wheels *as* burning fire. 10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. 11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld *even* till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. 12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. 13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient



of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Whether we understand the fourth beast to signify the Syrian empire, or the Roman, or the former as the figure of the latter, it is plain that these verses are intended for the comfort and support of the people of God in reference to the persecutions they were likely to sustain both from the one and from the other, and from all their proud enemies in every age; for it is written for their learning on whom the ends of the world have come, that they also, through patience and comfort of this scripture, might have hope. Three things are here discovered that are very encouraging:—

1. That there is a judgment to come, and God is the Judge. Now men have their day, and every pretender thinks he should have his day, and struggles for it. But *he that sits in heaven laughs at them*, for he sees that *his day is coming*, Ps. xxxvii. 13. *I beheld (v. 9) till the thrones were cast down*, not only the thrones of these beasts, but *all rule, authority, and power*, that are set up in opposition to the kingdom of God among men (1 Cor. xv. 24): such are the thrones of the kingdoms of the world, in comparison with God's kingdom; those that see them set up need but wait awhile, and they will see them cast down. *I beheld till thrones were set up* (so it may as well be read), Christ's throne and the throne of his Father. One of the rabbin confesses that these thrones are set up, one for God, another for the Son of David. It is the judgment that is here set, v. 10. Now, 1. This is intended to proclaim God's wise and righteous government of the world by his providence; and an unspeakable satisfaction it gives to all good men, in the midst of the convulsions and revolutions of states and kingdoms, that *the Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all* (Ps. ciii. 19), *that verily there is a God that judges in the earth*, Ps. lviii. 11. 2. Perhaps it points at the destruction brought by the providence of God upon the empire of Syria, or that of Rome, for their tyrannizing over the people of God. But, 3. It seems principally designed to describe the last judgment, for though it follow not immediately upon the dominion of the fourth beast, nay, though it be yet to come, perhaps many ages to come, yet it was intended that in every age the people of God should encourage themselves, under their troubles, with the belief and prospect of it. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of it, Jude 14. Does the

mouth of the enemy *speak great things*, v. 8. Here are far greater things which the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Many of the New-Testament predictions of the judgment to come have a plain allusion to this vision, especially St. John's vision of it, Rev. xx. 11, 12. (1.) The Judge is *the Ancient of days* himself, *God the Father*, the glory of whose presence is here described. He is called *the Ancient of days*, because he is *God from everlasting to everlasting*. Among men we reckon that *with the ancient is wisdom*, and *days shall speak*; shall not all flesh then be silent before him who is *the Ancient of days*? The glory of the Judge is here set forth by his garment, which was *white as snow*, denoting his splendour and purity in all the administrations of his justice; and *the hair of his head* clean and white, as *the pure wool*, that, as the white and hoary head, he may appear venerable. (2.) The throne is very formidable. It is *like the fiery flame*, dreadful to the wicked that shall be summoned before it. And the throne being movable upon wheels, or at least the chariot in which he rode the circuit, the wheels thereof are *as burning fire*, to devour the adversaries; for *our God is a consuming fire*, and with him are *everlasting burnings*, Isa xxxiii. 14. This is enlarged upon, v. 10. As to all his faithful friends there *proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb a pure river of water of life* (Rev. xxii. 1), so to all his implacable enemies there *issues and comes forth from his throne a fiery stream, a stream of brimstone* (Isa. xxx. 33), a fire that shall *devour before him*. He is a swift witness, and his word a word upon the wheels. (3.) The attendants are numerous and very splendid. The Shechinah is always attended with angels; it is so here (v. 10): *Thousand thousands minister to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him*. It is his glory that he has such attendants, but much more his glory that he neither needs them nor can be benefited by them. See how numerous the heavenly hosts are (there are *thousands of angels*), and how obsequious they are—they *stand before God*, ready to go on his errands and to take the first intimation of his will and pleasure. They will particularly be employed as ministers of his justice in the last judgment day, when the *Son of man shall come, and all the holy angels with him*. Enoch prophesied that the Lord should come *with his holy myriads*. (4.) The process is fair and unexceptionable: *The judgment is set*, publicly and openly, that all may have recourse to it; and *the books are opened*. As in courts of judgment among men the proceedings are in writing and upon record, which is laid open when the cause comes to a hearing, the examination of witnesses is produced, and affidavits are read, to clear the matter of fact, and the statute and common-law books are consulted to find out what is the law, so, in the judg-

ment of the great day, the equity of the sentence will be as incontestably evident as if there were books opened to justify it.

II. That the proud and cruel enemies of the church of God will certainly be reckoned with and brought down in due time, *v. 11, 12*. This is here represented to us, 1. In the destroying of the fourth beast. God's quarrel with this beast is *because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke*, bidding defiance to Heaven, and triumphing over all that is sacred; this provokes God more than any thing, for the *enemy to behave himself proudly*, Deut. xxxii. 27. Therefore Pharaoh must be humbled, because he has said, *Who is the Lord?* and has said, *I will pursue, I will overtake*. Enoch foretold that therefore the Lord would come to judge the world, that he might convince all that are ungodly of their hard speeches, Jude 15. Note, Great words are but idle words, for which men must give account in the great day. And see what becomes of this beast that talks so big: *He is slain, and his body destroyed and given to the burning flame*. The Syrian empire, after Antiochus, was destroyed. He himself died of a miserable disease, his family was rooted out, the kingdom wasted by the Parthians and Armenians, and at length made a province of the Roman empire by Pompey. And the Roman empire itself (if we take that for the fourth beast), after it began to persecute Christianity, declined and wasted away, and the body of it was destroyed. *So shall all thy enemies perish, O Lord!* and be slain before thee. 2. In the diminishing and weakening of the other three beasts (*v. 12*): They had their dominion taken away, and so were disabled from doing the mischiefs they had done to the church and people of God; but a prolonging in life was given them, for a time and a season, a set time, the bounds of which they could not pass. The power of the foregoing kingdoms was quite broken, but the people of them still remained in a mean, weak, and low condition. We may allude to this in describing the remainders of sin in the hearts of good people; they have corruptions in them, the lives of which are prolonged, so that they are not perfectly free from sin, but the dominion of them is taken away, so that sin does not reign in their mortal bodies. And thus God deals with his church's enemies; sometimes he breaks the teeth of them (Ps. iii. 7), when he does not break the neck of them, crushes the persecution, but reprieves the persecutors, that they may have space to repent. And it is fit that God, in doing his own work, should take his own time and way.

III. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up, and kept up, in the world, in spite of all the opposition of the powers of darkness. Let the heathen rage and fret as long as they please, God will set his King upon his holy hill of Zion. Daniel sees this in

vision, and comforts himself and his friends with the prospect of it. This is the same with Nebuchadnezzar's foresight of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which broke in pieces the image; but in this vision there is much more of pure gospel than in that. 1. The Messiah is here called the Son of man—one like unto the Son of man; for he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, was found in fashion as a man. I saw one like unto the Son of man, one exactly agreeing with the idea formed in the divine counsels of him that in the fulness of time was to be the Mediator between God and man. He is like unto the son of man, but is indeed the Son of God. Our Saviour seems plainly to refer to this vision when he says (John v. 27) that the Father has therefore given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of man, and because he is the person whom Daniel saw in vision, to whom a kingdom and dominion were to be given. 2. He is said to come with the clouds of heaven. Some refer this to his incarnation; he descended in the clouds of heaven, came into the world unseen, as the glory of the Lord took possession of the temple in a cloud. The empires of the world were beasts that rose out of the sea; but Christ's kingdom is from above: he is the Lord from heaven. I think it is rather to be referred to his ascension; when he returned to the Father the eye of his disciples followed him, till a cloud received him out of their sight, Acts i. 9. He made that cloud his chariot, wherein he rode triumphantly to the upper world. He comes swiftly, irresistibly, and comes in state, for he comes with the clouds of heaven. 3. He is here represented as having a mighty interest in Heaven. When the cloud received him out of the sight of his disciples, it is worth while to enquire (as the sons of the prophets concerning Elijah in a like case) whither it carried him, where it lodged him; and here we are told, abundantly to our satisfaction, that he came to the Ancient of days; for he ascended to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God (John xx. 17); from him he came forth, and to him he returns, to be glorified with him, and to sit down at his right hand. It was with a great deal of pleasure that he said, *Now I go to him that sent me*. But was he welcome? Yes, no doubt, he was, for they brought him near before him; he was introduced into his Father's presence, with the attendance and adorations of all the angels of God, Heb. i. 6. God caused him to draw near and approach to him, as an advocate and undertaker for us (Jer. xxx. 21), that we through him might be made nigh. By this solemn near approach which he made to the Ancient of days it appears that the Father accepted the sacrifice he offered, and the satisfaction he made, and was entirely well pleased with all he had done. He was brought near, as our high priest, who for us enters within the veil,



and as our forerunner, 4. He is here represented as having a mighty influence upon this earth, v. 14. When he went to be glorified with his Father he had a *power given him over all flesh*, John xvii. 2, 5. With the prospect of this Daniel and his friends are here comforted, that not only the dominion of the church's enemies shall be taken away (v. 12), but the church's head and best friend shall have the *dominion given him*; to him *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess*, Phil. ii. 9, 10. To him are given *glory and a kingdom*, and they are given by him who has an unquestionable right to give them, which, some think with an eye to these words, our Saviour teaches us to acknowledge in the close of the Lord's prayer, *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory*. It is here foretold that the kingdom of the exalted Redeemer shall be, (1.) A universal kingdom, the only universal monarchy, whatever others have pretended to, or aimed at: *All people, nations, and languages, shall fear him*, and be under his jurisdiction, either as his willing subjects or as his conquered captives, to be either ruled or overruled by him. One way or other, the kingdoms of the world shall all become his kingdoms. (2.) An everlasting kingdom. His *dominion* shall not *pass away* to any successor, much less to any invader, and his kingdom is *that which shall not be destroyed*. Even the gates of hell, or the infernal powers and policies, shall not prevail against it. The church shall continue militant to the end of time, and triumphant to the endless ages of eternity.

15 I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 16 I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. 17 These great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings, *which* shall arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. 19 Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth *were* of iron, and his nails *of* brass; *which* devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet; 20 And of the ten horns that *were* in his head, and *of* the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even *of* that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look *was* more

stout than his fellows. 21 I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; 22 Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. 23 Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. 24 And the ten horns out of this kingdom *are* ten kings *that* shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. 25 And he shall speak *great* words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. 26 But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy *it* unto the end. 27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. 28 Hitherto *is* the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.

Here we have, I. The deep impressions which these visions made upon the prophet. God in them put honour upon him, and gave him satisfaction, yet not without a great alloy of pain and perplexity (v. 15): *I Daniel was grieved in my spirit, in the midst of my body*. The word here used for the *body* properly signifies a *sheath* or *scabbard*, for the body is no more to the soul; that is the weapon; it is that which we are principally to take care of. The *visions of my head troubled me*, and again (v. 28), *my cogitations much troubled me*. The manner in which these things were discovered to him quite overwhelmed him, and put his thoughts so much to the stretch that his spirits failed him, and the trance he was in tired him and made him faint. The things themselves that were discovered amazed and astonished him, and put him into a confusion, till by degrees he recol-

lected and conquered himself, and set the comforts of the vision over against the terrors of it.

II. His earnest desire to understand the meaning of them (v. 16): *I came near to one of those that stood by, to one of the angels that appeared attending the Son of man in his glory, and asked him the truth* (the true intent and meaning) *of all this*. Note, It is a very desirable thing to take the right and full sense of what we see and hear from God; and those that would know must ask by faithful and fervent prayer and by *accomplishing a diligent search*.

III. The key that was given him, to let him into the understanding of this vision. The angel *told him*, and told him so plainly that he made him *know the interpretation of the thing*, and so made him somewhat more easy.

1. *The great beasts are great kings and their kingdoms, great monarchs and their monarchies, which shall arise out of the earth*, as those beasts did *out of the sea*, v. 17. They are but *terreæ filii*—*from beneath*; they savour of the earth, and their foundation is *in the dust*; they are of the earth earthy, and they are written in the dust, and to the dust they shall return.

2. Daniel pretty well understands the first three beasts, but concerning the fourth he desires to be better informed, because it differed so much from the rest, and was *exceedingly dreadful*, and not only so, but very mischievous, for it *devoured and broke in pieces*, v. 19. Perhaps it was this that put Daniel into such a fright, and this part of the visions of his head troubled him more than any of the rest. But especially he desired to know what the *little horn* was, that *had eyes*, and a *mouth that spoke very great things*, and whose countenance was more fearless and formidable than that of *any of his fellows*, v. 20. And this he was most inquisitive about because it was this horn that *made war with the saints, and prevailed against them*, v. 21. While no more is intimated than that the children of men make war with one another, and prevail against one another, the prophet does not show himself so much concerned (*let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth*, and be dashed in pieces one against another); but when they *make war with the saints*, when the *precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold*, are broken as *earthen pitchers*, it is time to ask, "What is the meaning of this? Will the Lord cast off his people? Will he suffer their enemies to trample upon them and triumph over them? What is this same horn that shall prevail so far against the saints?" To this his interpreter answers (v. 23—25) that this *fourth beast is a fourth kingdom, that shall devour the whole earth, or (as it may be read) the whole land*. That the *ten horns are ten kings*, and the *little horn* is another king that shall subdue three kings, and shall be very abusive to God and his people, shall act, (1.) Very impiously towards God. He shall *speak great words against the Most High*, setting him,

and his authority and justice, at defiance. (2.) Very impudently towards the people of God. *He shall wear out the saints of the Most High*; he will not cut them off at once, but wear them out by long oppressions and a constant course of hardships put upon them, ruining their estates and weakening their families. The design of Satan has been to *wear out the saints of the Most High*, that they may be no more in remembrance; but the attempt is vain, for while the world stands God will have a church in it. He shall *think to change times and laws*, to abolish all the ordinances and institutions of religion, and to bring every body to say and do just as he would have them. He shall trample upon laws and customs, human and divine. *Diruit, ædificat, mutat quadrata rotundis*—*He pulls down, he builds, he changes square into round*, as if he meant to alter even the ordinances of heaven themselves. And in these daring attempts he shall for a time prosper and have success; they shall be given into his hand *until time, times, and half a time* (that is, for three years and a half), that famous prophetic measure of time which we meet with in the Revelation, which is sometimes called forty-two months, sometimes 1260 days, which come all to one. But at the end of that time the *judgment shall sit and take away his dominion* (v. 26), which he expounds (v. 11) of the beast being *slain and his body destroyed*. And (as Mr. Mede reads v. 12) *as to the rest of the beast*, the ten horns, especially the little *ruffling* horn (as he calls it), they had their dominion taken away. Now the question is, Who is this enemy, whose rise, reign, and ruin, are here foretold? Interpreters are not agreed. Some will have the fourth kingdom to be that of the Seleucidae, and the little horn to be Antiochus, and show the accomplishment of all this in the history of the Maccabees; so Junius, Piscator, Polanus, Broughton, and many others: but others will have the fourth kingdom to be that of the Romans, and the *little horn* to be Julius Cæsar, and the succeeding emperors (says Calvin), the antichrist, the papal kingdom (says Mr. Joseph Mede), that *wicked one*, which, as this *little horn*, is to be consumed by the *brightness of Christ's second coming*. The pope assumes a power to *change times and laws, potestas adiutoriariorum*—*an absolute and despotic power*, as he calls it. Others make the *little horn* to be the *Turkish empire*; so Luther, Vatablus, and others. Now I cannot prove either side to be in the wrong; and therefore, since prophecies sometimes have many fulfillings, and we ought to give scripture its full latitude (in this as in many other controversies), I am willing to allow that they are both in the right, and that this prophecy has primary reference to the Syrian empire, and was intended for the encouragement of the Jews who suffered under Antiochus, that they might see even these melan-



choly times foretold, but might foresee a glorious issue of them at last, and the final overthrow of their proud oppressors; and, which is best of all, might foresee, not long after, the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah in the world, with the hopes of which it was usual with the former prophets to comfort the people of God in their distresses. But yet it has a further reference, and foretels the like persecuting power and rage in Rome heathen, and no less in Rome papal, against the Christian religion, that was in Antiochus against the pious Jews and their religion. And St. John, in his visions and prophecies, which point primarily at Rome, has plain reference, in many particulars, to these visions of Daniel.

3. He has a joyful prospect given him of the prevalence of God's kingdom among men, and its victory over all opposition at last. And it is very observable that in the midst of the predictions of the force and fury of the enemies this is brought in abruptly (v. 18 and again v. 22), before it comes, in the course of the vision, to be interpreted, v. 26, 27. And this also refers, (1.) To the prosperous days of the Jewish church, after it had weathered the storm under Antiochus, and the power which the Maccabees obtained over their enemies. (2.) To the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah in the world by the preaching of his gospel. *For judgment Christ comes into this world, to rule by his Spirit, and to make all his saints kings and priests to their God.* (3.) To the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the saints shall judge the world, shall sit down with him on his throne and triumph in the complete downfall of the devil's kingdom. Let us see what is here foretold. [1.] *The Ancient of days shall come, v. 22.* God shall judge the world by his Son, to whom he has committed all judgment, and, as an earnest of that, he comes for the deliverance of his oppressed people, comes for the setting up of his kingdom in the world. [2.] *The judgment shall sit, v. 26.* God will make it to appear that he judges in the earth, and will, both in wisdom and in equity, plead his people's righteous cause. At the great day he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained. [3.] *The dominion of the enemy shall be taken away, v. 26.* All Christ's enemies shall be made his footstool, and shall be consumed and destroyed to the end: these words the apostle uses concerning the man of sin, 2 Thess. ii. 8. He shall be consumed with the spirit of Christ's mouth and destroyed with the brightness of his coming. [4.] *Judgment is given to the saints of the Most High.* The apostles are entrusted with the preaching of a gospel by which the world shall be judged. All the saints by their faith and obedience condemn an unbelieving disobedient world; in Christ their head they shall judge the world, shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel, Matt. xix. 28. See what reason

we have to honour those that fear the Lord; how mean and despicable soever the saints now appear in the eye of the world, and how much contempt soever is poured upon them, they are the saints of the Most High; they are near and dear to God, and he owns them for his, and judgment is given to them. [5.] That which is most insisted upon is that the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, v. 18. And again (v. 22), *The time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.* And again (v. 27), *The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heavens, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.* Far be it from us to infer hence that dominion is founded on grace, or that this will warrant any, under pretence of saintship, to usurp kingship. No; *Christ's kingdom is not of this world*; but this intimates the spiritual dominion of the saints over their own lusts and corruptions, their victories over Satan and his temptations, and the triumphs of the martyrs over death and its terrors. It likewise promises that the gospel kingdom shall be set up, a kingdom of light, holiness, and love, a kingdom of grace, the privileges and comforts of which now, under the heavens, shall be the earnest and first-fruits of the kingdom of glory in the heavens. When the empire became Christian, and princes used their power for the defence and advancement of Christianity, then the saints possessed the kingdom. The saints rule by the Spirit's ruling in them (and this is the victory overcoming the world, even their faith) and by making the kingdoms of this world to become Christ's kingdom. But the full accomplishment of this will be in the everlasting happiness of the saints, the kingdom that cannot be moved, which we, according to his promise, look for (that is the greatness of the kingdom), the crown of glory that fades not away—that is the everlasting kingdom. See what an emphasis is laid upon this (v. 18): The saints shall possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever; and the reason is because he whose saints they are is the Most High and his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, v. 27. His is so, and therefore theirs shall be so. *Because I live, you shall live also,* John xiv. 19. His kingdom is theirs; they reckon themselves exalted in his exaltation, and desire no greater honour and satisfaction to themselves than that all dominions should serve and obey him, as they shall do, v. 27. They shall either be brought into subjection to his golden sceptre or brought to destruction by his iron rod.

Daniel, in the close, when he ends that matter, tells us what impressions this vision made upon him; it overwhelmed his spirits to such a degree that his countenance was changed, and it made him look pale; but he kept the matter in his heart. Note, The heart must be the treasury and store-house of divine things; there we must hide God's

word, as the Virgin Mary kept the sayings of Christ, Luke ii. 51. Daniel kept *the matter in his heart*, with a design, not to keep it from the church, but to keep it for the church, that what he had received from the Lord he might fully and faithfully deliver to the people. Note, It concerns God's prophets and ministers to treasure up the things of God in their minds, and there to digest them well. If we would have God's word ready in our mouths when we have occasion for it, we must keep it in our hearts at all times.

## CHAP. VIII.

The visions and prophecies of this chapter look only and entirely at the events that were then shortly to come to pass in the monarchies of Persia and Greece, and seem not to have any further reference at all. Nothing is here said of the Chaldean monarchy, for that was now just at its period; and therefore this chapter is written not in Chaldee, as the six foregoing chapters were, for the benefit of the Chaldeans, but in Hebrew, and so are the rest of the chapters to the end of the book, for the service of the Jews, that they might know what troubles were before them and what the issue of them would be, and might provide accordingly. In this chapter we have, I. The vision itself of the ram, and the he-goat, and the little horn that should fight and prevail against the people of God, for a certain limited time, ver. 1—14. II. The interpretation of this vision by an angel, showing that the ram signified the Persian empire, the he-goat the Grecian, and the little horn a king of the Grecian monarchy, that should set himself against the Jews and religion, which was Antiochus Epiphanes, ver. 15—27. The Jewish church, from its beginning, had been all along, more or less, blessed with prophets, men divinely inspired to explain God's mind to them in his providences and give them some prospect of what was coming upon them; but, soon after Ezra's time, divine inspiration ceased, and there was no more any prophet till the gospel day dawned. And therefore the events of that time were here foretold by Daniel, and left upon record, that even then God might not leave himself without witness, nor them without a guide.

**I**N the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, *even unto me Daniel*, after that which appeared unto me at the first. 2 And I saw in a vision; and it came to pass, when I saw, that I *was* at Shushan *in* the palace, which *is* in the province of Elam; and I saw in a vision, and I was by the river of Ulai. 3 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had *two* horns: and the *two* horns *were* high; but one *was* higher than the other, and the higher came up last. 4 I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither *was there any* that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great. 5 And as I was considering, behold, a he-goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat *had* a notable horn between his eyes. 6 And he came to the ram that had *two* horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in

the fury of his power. 7 And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with choler against him, and smote the ram, and brake his two horns: and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him: and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand. 8 Therefore the he-goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. 9 And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. 10 And it waxed great, *even to* the host of heaven; and it cast down *some* of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. 11 Yea, he magnified *himself* even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily *sacrifice* was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. 12 And a host was given *him* against the daily *sacrifice* by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered. 13 Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain *saint* which spake, How long *shall be* the vision *concerning* the daily *sacrifice*, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? 14 And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.

Here is, I. The date of this vision, *v. 1*. It was *in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar*, which proved to be his last year, as many reckon; so that this chapter also should be, in order of time, before the fifth. That Daniel might not be surprised at the destruction of Babylon, now at hand, God gives him a foresight of the destruction of other kingdoms hereafter, which in their day had been as potent as that of Babylon. Could we foresee the changes that shall be hereafter, when we are gone, we should the less admire, and be less affected with, the changes in our own day; for *that which is done is that which shall be done*, Eccl. i. 9. Then it was that a vision appeared to me, *even to me, Daniel*. Here he solemnly attests the truth of it: *it*



was to him, even to him, that the vision was shown; he was the eye-witness of it. And this vision puts him in mind of a former vision which *appeared to him at the first*, in the first year of this reign, which he makes mention of because this vision was an explication and confirmation of that, and points at many of the same events. That seems to have been a dream, a vision in his sleep; this seems to have been when he was awake.

II. The scene of this vision. The place where that was laid was in *Shushan the palace*, one of the royal seats of the kings of Persia, situated on the banks of the river Ulai, which surrounded the city; it was in the province of Elam, that part of Persia which lay next to Babylon. Daniel was not there in person, for he was now in Babylon, a captive, in some employment under Belshazzar, and might not go to such a distant country, especially being now an enemy's country. But he was there in vision; as Ezekiel, when a captive in Babylon, was often brought, in the spirit, to the land of Israel. Note, The soul may be at liberty when the body is in captivity; for, when we are bound, the Spirit of the Lord is not bound. The vision related to that country, and therefore there he was made to fancy himself to be as strongly as if he had really been there.

III. The vision itself and the process of it.

1. He saw a *ram with two horns*, v. 3. This was the second monarchy, of which the kingdoms of Media and Persia were the two horns. The horns were *very high*; but that which came up last was the higher, and got the start of the former. So the last shall be first, and the first last. The kingdom of Persia, which rose last, in Cyrus, became more eminent than that of the Medes.

2. He saw this *ram pushing* all about him with his horns (v. 4), *westward* (towards Babylon, Syria, Greece, and Asia the less), *northward* (towards the Lydians, Armenians, and Scythians), and *southward* (towards Arabia, Ethiopia, and Egypt), for all these nations did the Persian empire, one time or other, make attempts upon for the enlarging of their dominion. And at last he became so powerful that *no beasts might stand before him*. This *ram*, though of a species of animal often preyed upon, became formidable even to the beasts of prey themselves, so that there was *no standing* before him, no escaping him, none that *could deliver out of his hand*, but all must yield to him: the kings of Persia did according to *their will*, prospered in all their ways abroad, had an uncontrollable power at home, and *became great*. He thought himself great because he did what he would; but to do good is that which makes men truly great.

3. He saw this *ram overcome* by a he-goat. He was considering the *ram* (wondering that so weak an animal should come to be so prevalent) and thinking what would be the

issue; and, *behold, a he-goat came*, v. 5. This was Alexander the Great, the son of Philip king of Macedonia. He *came from the west* from Greece, which lay west from Persia. He fetched a great compass with his army: he *came upon the face of the whole earth*; he did in effect conquer the world, and then sat down and wept because there was not another world to be conquered. *Unus Pellæo juveni non sufficit orbis—One world was too little for the youth of Pellæ.* This he-goat (a creature famed for comeliness in going, Prov. xxx. 31) went on with incredible swiftness, so that he *touched not the ground*, so lightly did he move; he rather seemed to fly above the ground than to go upon the ground; or *none touched him in the earth*, that is, he met with little or no opposition. This *he-goat*, or buck, had a *notable horn between his eyes*, like a unicorn. He had strength, and knew his own strength; he saw himself a match for all his neighbours. Alexander pushed his conquests on so fast, and with so much fury, that none of the kingdoms he attacked had courage to make a stand, or give check to the progress of his victorious arms. In six years he made himself master of the greatest part of the then known world. Well might he be called a *notable horn*, for his name still lives in history as the name of one of the most celebrated commanders in war that ever the world knew. Alexander's victories and achievements are still the entertainment of the ingenious. This *he-goat came to the ram that had two horns*, v. 6. Alexander with his victorious army attacked the kingdom of Persia, an army consisting of no more than 30,000 foot and 5000 horse. He *ran unto him*, to surprise him ere he could get intelligence of his motions, *in the fury of his power*. He came *close to the ram*. Alexander with his army came up with Darius Codomannus, then emperor of Persia, being *moved with choler against him*, v. 7. It was with the greatest violence that Alexander pushed on his war against Darius, who, though he brought vast numbers into the field, yet, for want of skill, was an unequal match for him, so that Alexander was too hard for him whenever he engaged him, *smote him, cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him*, which three expressions, some think, refer to the three famous victories that Alexander obtained over Darius, at Granicus, at Issus, and at Arbela, by which he was at length totally routed, having, in the last battle, had 600,000 men killed, so that Alexander became absolute master of all the Persian empire, *broke his two horns*, the kingdoms of Media and Persia. The ram that had destroyed *all before him* (v. 4) now is himself destroyed; Darius has *no power to stand* before Alexander, nor has he any friends or allies to help to *deliver him out of his hand*. Note, Those kingdoms which, when they had power, abused it, and, because none could oppose them, withheld not themselves

from the doing of any wrong, may expect to have their power at length taken from them, and to be served in their own kind, Isa. xxxiii. 1.

4. He saw the he-goat made hereby very considerable; but the *great horn*, that had done all this execution, *was broken*, v. 8. Alexander was about twenty years old when he began his wars. When he was about twenty-six he conquered Darius, and became master of the whole Persian empire; but when he was about thirty-two or thirty-three *years of age*, when he was *strong*, in his full strength, he was *broken*. He was not killed in war, in the bed of honour, but died of a drunken surfeit, or, as some suspect, by poison, and left no child living behind him to enjoy that which he had endlessly laboured for, but left a lasting monument of the vanity of worldly pomp and power, and their insufficiency to make a man happy.

5. He saw this kingdom divided into four parts, and that instead of that one great horn there came up *four notable ones*, Alexander's four captains, to whom he bequeathed his conquests; and he had so much that, when it was divided among four, they had each of them enough for any one man. These *four notable horns* were towards the *four winds of heaven*, the same with the *four heads* of the leopard (ch. vii. 6), the kingdoms of Syria and Egypt, Asia and Greece—Syria lying to the east, Greece to the west, Asia Minor to the north, and Egypt to the south. Note, Those that heap up riches know not who shall gather them, nor whose all those things shall be which they have provided.

6. He saw a *little horn* which became a great persecutor of the church and people of God; and this was the principal thing that was intended to be shown to him in this vision, as afterwards, ch. xi. 30, &c. All agree that this was *Antiochus Epiphanes* (so he called himself)—*the illustrious*, but others called him *Antiochus Epimanes*—*Antiochus the furious*. He is called here (as before, ch. vii. 8) a *little horn*, because he was in his original contemptible; there were others between him and the kingdom, and he was of a base servile disposition, had nothing in him of princely qualities, and had been for some time a hostage and prisoner at Rome, whence he made his escape, and, though the youngest brother, and his elder living, got the kingdom. He waxed exceedingly great towards the south, for he seized upon Egypt, and towards the east, for he invaded Persia and Armenia. But that which is here especially taken notice of is the mischief that he did to the people of the Jews. They are not expressly named, for prophecies must not be too plain; but they are here so described that it would be easy for those who understood scripture-language to know who were meant; and the Jews, having notice of this before, might be awakened to prepare themselves and their children beforehand for

these suffering trying times. (1.) He set himself against the *pleasant land*, the land of Israel, so called because it was the *glory of all lands*, for fruitfulness and all the delights of human life, but especially for the tokens of God's presence in it, and its being blessed with divine revelations and institutions; it was Mount Zion that was *beautiful for situation*, and the *joy of the whole earth*, Ps. xlviii. 2. The pleasantness of that land was that there the Messiah was to be born, who would be both the consolation and the *glory of his people Israel*. Note, We have reason to reckon that a pleasant place which is a holy place, in which God dwells, and where we may have opportunity of communing with him. Surely, *It is good to be here*. (2.) He fought against the *host of heaven*, that is, the people of God, the church, which is the kingdom of heaven, the church-militant here on earth. The saints, being born from above, and citizens of heaven, and doing the will of God, by his grace, in some measure, as the angels of heaven do it, may be well called a *heavenly host*. Or the priests and Levites, who were employed in the service of the tabernacle, and there *warred a good warfare*, were this *host of heaven*. These Antiochus set himself against; he *waxed great to the host of heaven*, in opposition to them and in defiance of them. (3.) He *cast down some of the host* (that is, of the stars, for they are called the host of heaven) *to the ground, and stamped upon them*. Some of those that were most eminent both in church and state, that were burning and shining lights in their generation, he either forced to comply with his idolatries or put them to death; he got them into his hands, and then trampled upon them and triumphed over them; as good old Eleazar, and the *seven brethren*, whom he put to death with cruel tortures, because they would not eat swine's flesh, 2 Mac. vi. 7. He gloried in it that herein he insulted Heaven itself and *exalted his throne above the stars of God*, Isa. xiv. 13. (4.) He *magnified himself even to the prince of the host*. He set himself against the high priest, Onias, whom he deprived of his dignity, or rather against God himself, who was Israel's *King of old*, who *reigns for ever* Zion's King, who himself heads his own host that fight his battles. Against him Antiochus magnified himself; as Pharaoh, when he said, *Who is the Lord?* Note, Those who persecute the people of God persecute God himself. (5.) He *took away the daily sacrifice*. The morning and evening lamb, which God appointed to be offered every day upon his altar to his honour, Antiochus forbade and restrained the offering of. No doubt he took away all other sacrifices, but only the *daily sacrifice* is mentioned, because that was the greatest loss of all, for in that they kept up their constant communion with God, which they preferred before that which is only occasional. God's people reckon their daily sacrifices



their morning and evening exercises of devotion, the most needful of their daily business and the most delightful of their daily comforts, and would not for all the world part with them. (6.) He *cast down the place of his sanctuary*. He did not burn and demolish the temple, but he cast it down, when he profaned it, made it the temple of Jupiter Olympius, and set up his image in it. He also *cast down the truth to the ground*, trampled upon the book of the law, that word of truth, tore it, and burnt it, and did what he could to destroy it quite, that it might be lost and forgotten for ever. These were the projects of that wicked prince. In these he practised. And (would you think it?) in these he prospered. He carried the matter very far, seemed to have gained his point, and went near to extirpate that holy religion which God's right hand had planted. But lest he or any other should triumph, as if herein he had prevailed against God himself and been too hard for him, the matter is here explained and set in a true light. [1.] He could not have done this if God had not permitted him to do it, could have had no power against Israel unless it had been given him from above. God put this power into his hand, and *gave him a host against the daily sacrifice*. God's providence put that sword into his hand by which he was enabled thus to bear down all before him. Note, We ought to eye and own the hand of God in all the enterprises and all the successes of the church's enemies against the church. They are but the rod in God's hand. [2.] God would not have permitted it if his people had not provoked him to do so. It is *by reason of transgression*, the transgression of Israel, to correct them for that, that Antiochus is employed to give them all this trouble. Note, When the pleasant land and all its pleasant things are laid waste, it must be acknowledged that sin is the procuring cause of all the desolation. *Who gave Jacob to the spoil? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned?* Isa. xlii. 24. The great transgression of the Jews after the captivity (when they were cured of idolatry) was a contempt and profanation of the holy things, *snuffing* at the service of God, *bringing the torn and the lame for sacrifice*, as if the *table of the Lord* were a contemptible thing (so we find Mal. i. 7, 8, &c., and that the priests were guilty of this Mal. ii. 1, 8), and therefore God sent Antiochus to *take away the daily sacrifice* and *cast down the place of his sanctuary*. Note, It is just with God to deprive those of the privileges of his house who despise and profane them, and to make those know the worth of ordinances by the want of them who would not know it by the enjoyment of them.

7. He heard the time of this calamity limited and determined, not the time *when it should come* (that is not here fixed, because God would have his people always prepared for it), but *how long it should last*, that, when

they had no more any *prophets to tell them how long* (Ps. lxxiv. 9, which psalm seems to have been calculated for this dark and doleful day), they might have this prophecy to give them a prospect of deliverance in due time. Now concerning this we have here,

(1.) The question asked concerning it, v. 13. Observe [1.] By whom the question was put: *I heard one saint speaking* to this purport, and then *another saint* seconded him. "O that we knew how long this trouble will last!" The angels here are called *saints*, for they are *holy ones* (ch. iv. 13), the *holy myriads*, Jude 14. The angels concern themselves in the affairs of the church, and enquire concerning them, if, as here, concerning its temporal salvations, much more do they desire to *look into the great salvation*, 1 Pet. i. 12. One saint *spoke* of the thing, and another *enquired* concerning it. Thus John, who lay in Christ's bosom, was beckoned to by Peter to ask Christ a question, John xiii. 23, 24. [2.] To whom the question was put. He said *unto Palmoni that spoke*. Some make this *certain saint* to be a superior angel who understood more than the rest, to whom therefore they came with their enquiries. Others make it to be the *eternal Word*, the *Son of God*. He is the *unknown One*. *Palmoni* seems to be compounded of *Peloni Almoni*, which is used (Ruth iv. 1) for *Ho, such a one*, and (2 Kings vi. 8) for *such a place*. Christ was yet the *nameless One*. *Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret?* Judg. xiii. 18. He is the *numberer of secrets* (as some translate it), for from him there is nothing hidden—the *wonderful numberer*, so others; his name is called *Wonderful*. Note, If we would know the mind of God, we must apply to Jesus Christ, who lay in the bosom of the Father, and *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, not hidden from us, but hidden for us. [3.] The question itself that was asked: "*How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice? How long shall the prohibition of it continue? How long shall the pleasant land be made unpleasant by that severe interdict? How long shall the transgression of desolation* (the image of Jupiter), *that great transgression which makes all our sacred things desolate, how long shall that stand in the temple? How long shall the sanctuary and the host, the holy place and the holy persons that minister in it, be trodden under foot by the oppressor?*" Note, Angels are concerned for the prosperity of the church on earth and desirous to see an end of its desolations. The angels asked, for the satisfaction of Daniel, not doubting but he was desirous to know, how long these calamities should last? The question takes it for granted that they should not last always. *The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous*, though it may come upon their lot. Christ comforted himself in his sufferings

with this, *The things concerning me have an end* (Luke xxii. 37), and so may the church in hers. But it is desirable to know how long they shall last, that we may provide accordingly.

(2.) The answer given to this question, v. 14. Christ gives instruction to the holy angels, for they are our fellow-servants; but here the answer was given to Daniel, because for his sake the question was asked: *He said unto me.* God sometimes gives in great favours to his people, in answer to the enquiries and requests of their friends for them. Now, [1.] Christ assures him that the trouble shall end; it shall continue 2300 days and no longer, so many *evenings and mornings* (so the word is), so many *νυχθημεραι*, so many *natural days*, reckoned, as in the beginning of Genesis, by the evenings and mornings, because it was the evening and the morning sacrifice that they most lamented the loss of, and thought the time passed very slowly while they were deprived of them. Some make the morning and the evening, in this number, to stand for two, and then 2300 evenings and as many mornings will make but 1150 days; and about so many days it was that the daily sacrifice was interrupted: and this comes nearer to the computation (*ch. vii. 25*) of a *time, times*, and the *dividing of a time*. But it is less forced to understand them of so many natural days; 2300 days make *six years and three months*, and about eighteen days; and just so long they reckon from the defection of the people, procured by Menelaus the high priest in the 142nd year of the kingdom of the Seleucidæ, the sixth month of that year, and the 6th day of the month (so Josephus dates it), to the cleansing of the sanctuary, and the re-establishment of religion among them, which was in the 148th year, the 9th month, and the 25th day of the month, 1 Mac. iv. 52. God reckons the time of his people's affliction by *days*, for in all their afflictions he is afflicted. Rev. ii. 10, Thou shalt have *tribulation ten days*. [2.] He assures him that they shall see better days afterwards: *Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed*. Note, The cleansing of the sanctuary is a happy token for good to any people; when they begin to be reformed they will soon be relieved. Though the righteous God may, for the correction of his people, suffer his sanctuary to be profaned for a while, yet the jealous God will, for his own glory, see to the cleansing of it in due time. Christ died to cleanse his church, and he will so cleanse it as at length to present it blameless to himself.

15 And it came to pass, when I, *even* I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. 16 And I heard a man's voice between *the banks of*

Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this *man* to understand the vision. 17 So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end *shall be* the vision. 18 Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. 19 And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end *shall be*. 20 The ram which thou sawest having *two horns are* the kings of Media and Persia. 21 And the rough goat *is* the king of Grecia: and the great horn that *is* between his eyes *is* the first king. 22 Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power. 23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. 24 And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. 25 And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify *himself* in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand. 26 And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told *is* true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it *shall be* for many days. 27 And I Daniel fainted, and was sick *certain* days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood *it*.

Here we have,

I. Daniel's earnest desire to have this vision explained to him (v. 15): *I sought the meaning*. Note, Those that rightly know the things of God cannot but desire to know more and more of them, and to be led further into the mystery of them; and those



that would find the meaning of what they have seen or heard from God must seek it, and seek it diligently. *Seek and you shall find.* Daniel considered the thing, compared it with the former discoveries, to try if he could understand it; but especially he sought by prayer (as he had done *ch. ii. 18*), and he did not seek in vain.

II. Orders given to the angel Gabriel to inform him concerning this vision. One in the appearance of a man (who, some think, was Christ himself, for who besides could command angels?) orders Gabriel to make Daniel understand this vision. Sometimes God is pleased to make use of the ministration of angels, not only to protect his children, but to instruct them, to serve the kind intentions, not only of his providence, but of his grace.

III. The consternation that Daniel was in upon the approach of his instructor (*v. 17*): *When he came near I was afraid.* Though Daniel was a man of great prudence and courage, and had been conversant with the visions of the Almighty, yet the approach of an extraordinary messenger from heaven put him into this fright. He fell upon his face, not to worship the angel, but because he could no longer bear the dazzling lustre of his glory. Nay, being prostrate upon the ground, he fell into a deep sleep (*v. 18*), which came not from any neglect of the vision, or indifference towards it, but was an effect of his faintness and the oppression of spirit he was under, through the abundance of revelations. The disciples in the garden slept for sorrow; and, as there, so here, *the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.* Daniel would have kept awake, and could not.

IV. The relief which the angel gave to Daniel, with great encouragement to him to expect a satisfactory discovery of the meaning of this vision. 1. He touched him, and set him upon his feet, *v. 18*. Thus when John, in a similar case, was in similar consternation, Christ laid his right hand upon him, *Rev. i. 17*. It was a gentle touch that the angel here gave to Daniel, to show that he came not to hurt him, not to plead against him with his great power, or with a hand heavy upon him, but to help him, to put strength into him (*Job xxiii. 6*), which God can do with a touch. When we are slumbering and grovelling on this earth we are very unfit to hear from God, and to converse with him. But, if God design instruction for us, he will by his grace awaken us out of our slumber, raise us from things below, and set us upright. 2. He promised to inform him: "*Understand, O son of man! v. 17. Thou shalt understand, if thou wilt but apply thy mind to understand.*" He calls him *son of man* to intimate that he would consider his frame, and would deal tenderly with him, accommodating himself to his capacity as a man. Or thus he preaches humility to him; though he be admitted to converse with angels, he

must not be puffed up with it, but must remember that he is a son of man. Or perhaps this title puts an honour upon him: the Messiah was lately called the *Son of man* (*ch. vii. 13*), and Daniel is akin to him, and is a figure of him as a prophet and one greatly beloved. He assures him that he shall be made to know *what shall be in the last end of the indignation, v. 19*. Let it be laid up for a comfort to those who shall live to see these calamitous times that there shall be an end of them; *the indignation shall cease* (*Isa. x. 25*); *it shall be overpast*, *Isa. xxvi. 20*. It may intermit and return again, but the last end shall be glorious; good will follow it, nay, and good will be brought out of it. He tells him (*v. 17*), "*At the time of the end shall be the vision*"; when the last end of the indignation comes, when the course of this providence is completed, then the vision shall be made plain and intelligible by the event, as the event shall be made plain and intelligible by the vision." Or, "*At the time of the end of the Jewish church, in the latter days of it, shall this vision be accomplished, 300 or 400 years hence*; understand it therefore, that thou mayest leave it on record for the generations to come." But if he ask more particularly, "*When is the time of the end? And how long will it be before it arrive?*" let this answer suffice (*v. 19*): *At the time appointed the end shall be*; it is fixed in the divine counsel, which cannot be altered and which must not be pried into.

V. The exposition which he gave him of the vision.

1. Concerning the two monarchies of Persia and Greece, *v. 20—22*. The ram signified the succession of the kings of Media and Persia; the rough goat signified the kings of Greece; the great horn was Alexander; the four horns that rose in his room were the four kingdoms into which his conquests were cantoned, of which before, *v. 8*. They are said to stand up out of the nations, but not in his power; none of them ever made the figure that Alexander did. Josephus relates that when Alexander had taken Tyre, and subdued Palestine, and was upon his march to Jerusalem, Jaddas, who was then high priest (*Nehemiah* mentions one of his name, *ch. xii. 11*), fearing his rage, had recourse to God by prayer and sacrifice for the common safety, and was by him warned in a dream that upon Alexander's approach he should throw open the gates of the city, and that he and the rest of the priests should go forth to meet him in their habits, and all the people in white. Alexander, seeing this company at a distance, went himself alone to the high priest, and, having prostrated himself before that God whose name was engraven in the golden plate of his mitre, he first saluted him; and, being asked by one of his own captains why he did so, he said that while he was yet in Macedon, moving on the conquest of Asia, there appeared to him



a man like unto this, and thus attired, who invited him into Asia, and assured him of success in the conquest of it. The priests led him to the temple, where he offered sacrifice to the God of Israel as they directed him; and there they showed him this book of the prophet Daniel, that it was there foretold that a Grecian should come and destroy the Persians, which animated him very much in the expedition he was now meditating against Darius. Hereupon he took the Jews and their religion under his protection, promised to be kind to those of their religion in Babylon and Media, whither he was now marching, and in honour of him all the priests that had sons born that year called them *Alexander*. *Joseph. lib. 11.*

2. Concerning Antiochus, and his oppression of the Jews. This is said to be in the *latter time of the kingdom of the Greeks, when the transgressors are come to the full* (v. 23); that is, when the degenerate Jews have filled up the measure of their iniquity, and are ripe for this destruction, so that God cannot in honour bear with them any longer, then shall *stand up* this king, to be *flagellum Dei—the rod in God's hand* for the chastising of the Jews. Now observe here, (1.) His character: He shall be a *king of fierce countenance*, insolent and furious, neither fearing God nor regarding man, *understanding dark sentences*, or (rather) *versed in dark practices, the hidden things of dishonesty*; he was master of all the arts of dissimulation and deceit, and knew the *depths of Satan* as well as any man. He was *wise to do evil*. (2.) His success. He shall make dreadful havoc of the nations about him: *His power shall be mighty*, bear down all before it, but not by *his own power* (v. 24), but partly by the assistance of his allies, Eumenes and Attalus, partly by the baseness and treachery of many of the Jews, even of the priests that came into his interests, and especially by the divine permission. It was not by his own power, but by a power given him from above, that he *destroyed wonderfully*, and thought he made himself a great man by being a great destroyer. He destroys wonderfully indeed, for he destroys, [1.] *The mighty people*, and they cannot resist him by their power. The princes of Egypt cannot stand before him with all their forces, but he practises against them and prospers. Note, The mighty ones of the earth commonly meet with those at length that are too hard for them, that are more mighty than they. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, be it ever so great, unless he could be sure that there were none stronger than he. [2.] He destroys the *holy people*, or *the people of the holy ones*; and their sacred character does neither deter him from destroying them nor defend them from being destroyed. *All things come alike to all*, and there is one event to the mighty and to the holy in this world. [3.] The methods by

which he will gain this success, not by true courage, wisdom, or justice, but by his *policy* and *craft* (v. 25), by fraud and deceit, and serpentine subtlety: He shall *cause craft to prosper*; so cunningly shall he carry on his projects that he shall gain his point by the art of wheedling. *By peace he shall destroy many*, as others do by war; under the pretence of treaties, leagues, and alliances, with them, he shall encroach on their rights, and trick them into a subjection to him. Thus sometimes what a nation truly brave has gained in a righteous war a nation truly base has regained in a treacherous peace, and craft has been caused to prosper. [4.] The mischief that he shall do to religion: *He shall magnify himself in his heart*, and think himself fit to prescribe and give law to every body, so that he shall *stand up against the Prince of princes*, that is, against God himself. He will profane his temple and altar, prohibit his worship, and persecute his worshippers. See what a height of impudence some men's impiety brings them to; they openly bid defiance to God himself though he is the King of kings. [5.] The ruin that he shall be brought to at last: *He shall be broken without hand*, that is, without the hand of man. He shall not be slain in war, nor shall he be assassinated, as tyrants commonly were, but he shall fall into the hand of the living God and die by an immediate stroke of his vengeance. He, hearing that the Jews had cast the image of Jupiter Olympius out of the temple, where he had placed it, was so enraged at the Jews that he vowed he would make Jerusalem a *common burial-place*, and determined to march thither immediately; but no sooner had he spoken these proud words than he was struck with an incurable plague in his bowels; worms bred so fast in his body that whole flakes of flesh sometimes dropped from him; his torments were violent, and the stench of his disease such that none could endure to come near him. He continued in this misery very long. At first he persisted in his menaces against the Jews; but at length, despairing of his recovery, he called his friends together, and acknowledged all those miseries to have fallen upon him for the injuries he had done to the Jews and his profaning the temple at Jerusalem. Then he wrote courteous letters to the Jews, and vowed that if he recovered he would let them have the free exercise of their religion. But, finding his disease grow upon him, when he could no longer endure his own smell, he said, *It is meet to submit to God, and for man who is mortal not to set himself in competition with God*, and so died miserably in a strange land, on the mountains of Pacata near Babylon: so Usher's Annals, A. M. 3340, about 160 years before the birth of Christ.

3. As to the time fixed for the continuance of the cessation of the daily sacrifice, it is not explained here, but only confirmed (v.



26): 'That *vision of the evening and morning is true*, in the proper sense of the words, and needs no explication. How unlikely soever it might be that God should suffer his own sanctuary to be thus profaned, yet it is true, it is too true, so it shall be.

VI. Here is the conclusion of this vision, and here, 1. The charge given to Daniel to keep it private for the present: *Shut thou up the vision*; let it not be publicly known among the Chaldeans, lest the Persians, who were now shortly to possess the kingdom, should be incensed against the Jews by it, because the downfall of their kingdom was foretold by it, which would be unseasonable now that the edict for their release was expected from the king of Persia. *Shut it up, for it shall be for many days*. It was about 300 years from the time of this vision to the time of the accomplishment of it; therefore he must *shut it up* for the present, even from the people of the Jews, lest it should amaze and perplex them, but let it be kept safely for the generations to come, that should live about the time of the accomplishment of it, for to them it would be both most intelligible and most serviceable. Note, What we know of the things of God should be carefully laid up, that hereafter, when there is occasion, it may be faithfully laid out; and what we have not now any use for, yet we may have another time. Divine truths should be scaled up among our treasures, that we may find them again after many days. 2. The care he took to keep it private, having received such a charge, v. 27. He *fainted, and was sick*, with the multitude of his thoughts within him occasioned by this vision, which oppressed and overwhelmed him the more because he was forbidden to publish what he had seen, so that *his belly was as wine which has no vent, he was ready to burst like new bottles*, Job xxxii. 19. However, he kept it to himself, stifled and smothered the concern he was in; so that those he conversed with could not perceive it, but he *did the king's business* according to the duty of his place, whatever it was. Note, As long as we live in this world we must have something to do in it; and even those whom God has most dignified with his favours must not think themselves above their business; nor must the pleasure of communion with God take us off from the duties of our particular callings, but still we must in them *abide with God*. Those especially that are entrusted with public business must see to it that they conscientiously discharge their trust.

#### CHAP. IX.

In this chapter we have, I. Daniel's prayer for the restoration of the Jews who were in captivity, in which he confesses sin, and acknowledges the justice of God in their calamities, but pleads God's promises of mercy which he had yet in store for them, v. 1—19. II. An immediate answer sent him by an angel to his prayer, in which, 1. He is assured of the speedy release of the Jews out of their captivity, v. 20—23. And, 2. He is informed concerning the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ (of which that was a type), what should be the nature of it and when it should be accomplished, v. 24—27. And it is the clearest, brightest, prophecy of the Messiah, in all the Old Testament.

IN the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

We left Daniel, in the close of the foregoing chapter, employed in the *king's business*; but here we have him employed in better business than any the king had for him, speaking to God and hearing from him, not for himself only, but for the church, whose mouth he was to God, and for whose use the *oracles* of God were *committed to him*, relating to the days of the Messiah. Observe, 1. When it was that Daniel had this communion with God (v. 1), *in the first year of Darius the Mede*, who was newly made king of the Chaldeans, Babylon being conquered by him and his nephew, or grandson, Cyrus. In this year the seventy years of the Jews' captivity ended, but the decree for their release was not yet issued out; so that this address of Daniel's to God seems to have been ready in that year, and, probably, before he was cast into the lions' den. And one powerful inducement, perhaps, it was to him then to keep so close to the duty of prayer, though it cost him his life, that he had so lately experienced the benefit and comfort of it. 2. What occasioned his address to God by prayer (v. 2): He *understood by books* that seventy years was the time fixed for the continuance of the *desolations of Jerusalem*, v. 2. The *book* by which he understood this was the book of the prophecies of Jeremiah, in which he found it expressly foretold (Jer. xxix. 10), *After seventy years be accomplished in Babylon* (and therefore they must be reckoned from the first captivity, in the *third year of Jchoiakim*, which Daniel had reason to remember by a good token, for it was in that captivity that he was carried away himself, ch. i. 1), *I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you*. It was likewise said (Jer. xxv. 11), *This whole land shall be seventy years a desolation (chorbath)*, the same word that Daniel here uses for the *desolations of Jerusalem*, which shows that he had that prophecy before him when he wrote this. Though Daniel was himself a great prophet, and one that was well acquainted with the visions of God, yet he was a diligent student in the scripture, and thought it no disparagement to him to consult Jeremiah's prophecies. He was a great politician, and prime-minister of state to one of the greatest

monarchs upon earth, and yet could find both heart and time to converse with the word of God. The greatest and best men in the world must not think themselves above their Bibles. 3. How serious and solemn his address to God was when he understood that the seventy years were just upon expiring (for it appears, by Ezekiel's dating of his prophecies, that they exactly computed the years of their captivity), then he *set his face to seek God by prayer*. Note, God's promises are intended, not to supersede, but to excite and encourage, our prayers; and, when we see the day of the performance of them approaching, we should the more earnestly plead them with God and put them in suit. So Daniel did here; he prayed three times a day, and, no doubt, in every prayer made mention of the desolations of Jerusalem; yet he did not think that enough, but even in the midst of his business set time apart for an extraordinary application to Heaven on Jerusalem's behalf. God had said to Ezekiel that though Daniel, among others, stood before him, his intercession should not prevail to prevent the judgment (Ezek. xiv. 14), yet he hopes, now that *the warfare is accomplished* (Isa. xl. 2), his prayer may be heard for the removing of the judgment. When the day of deliverance dawns it is time for God's praying people to bestir themselves; something extraordinary is then expected and required from them, besides their daily sacrifice. Now *Daniel sought by prayer and supplications*, for fear lest the sins of the people should provoke him to defer their deliverance longer than was intended, or rather that the people might be prepared by the grace of God for the deliverance now that the providence of God was about to work it out for them. Now observe, (1.) The intenseness of his mind in this prayer: *I set my face unto the Lord God to seek him*, which denotes the fixedness of his thoughts, the firmness of his faith, and the fervour of his devout affections, in the duty. We must, in prayer, set God before us, and set ourselves as in his presence; to him we must *direct our prayer* and must *look up*. Probably, in token of his setting his face towards God, he did, as usual, set his face towards Jerusalem, to affect his own heart the more with the desolations of it. (2.) The mortification of his body in this prayer. In token of his deep humiliation before God for his own sins, and the sins of his people, and the sense he had of his unworthiness, when he prayed he *fasted*, put on *sackcloth*, and lay in *ashes*, the more to affect himself with the desolations of Jerusalem, which he was praying for the repair of, and to make himself sensible that he was now about an extraordinary work.

4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O LORD, the great and dreadful

God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; 5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: 6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 O LORD, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are near*, and *that are far off*, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. 8 O LORD, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. 9 To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; 10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. 12 And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. 13 As *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. 14 Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. 15 And now, O LORD our God, that hast brought thy people



forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 O LORD, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all *that are* about us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. 18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

We have here Daniel's prayer to God as his God, and the confession which he joined with that prayer: *I prayed, and made my confession*. Note, In every prayer we must make confession, not only of the sins we have been guilty of (which we commonly call *confession*), but of our faith in God and dependence upon him, our sorrow for sin and our resolutions against it. It must be our confession, must be the language of our own convictions and that which we ourselves do heartily subscribe to.

Let us go over the several parts of this prayer, which we have reason to think that he offered up much more largely than is here recorded, these being only the heads of it.

I. Here is his humble, serious, reverent address to God, in which he gives glory to God, 1. As a God to be feared, and whom it is our duty always to stand in awe of: "*O Lord! the great and dreadful God, that art able to deal with the greatest and most terrible of the church's enemies.*" 2. As a God to be trusted, and whom it is our duty to depend upon and put a confidence in: *Keeping the covenant and mercy to those that love him*, and, as a proof of their love to him, *keep his commandments*. If we fulfil our part of the bargain, he will not fail to fulfil his. He will be to his people as good as his word, for he keeps covenant with them, and not one iota of his promise shall fall to the ground; nay, he will be better than his word, for he keeps mercy to them, something more than

was in the covenant. It was proper for Daniel to have his eye upon God's mercy now that he was to lay before him the miseries of his people, and upon God's covenant now that he was to sue for the performance of a promise. Note, We should, in prayer, look both at God's greatness and his goodness, his majesty and mercy in conjunction.

II. Here is a penitent confession of sin, the procuring cause of all the calamities which his people had for so many years been groaning under, v. 5, 6. When we seek to God for national mercies we ought to humble ourselves before him for national sins. These are the sins Daniel here laments; and we may here observe the variety of words he makes use of to set forth the greatness of their provocations (for it becomes penitents to lay load upon themselves): *We have sinned* in many particular instances, nay, *we have committed iniquity*, we have driven a trade of sin, *we have done wickedly* with a hard heart and a stiff neck, and herein we have *rebelled*, have taken up arms against the King of kings, his crown and dignity. Two things aggravated their sins:—1. That they had violated the express laws God had given them by Moses: "*We have departed from thy precepts and from thy judgments, and have not conformed to them. And (v. 10) we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.*" That which speaks the nature of sin, that it is *the transgression of the law*, does sufficiently speak the malignity of it; if sin be made to *appear sin*, it cannot be made to appear worse; its *sinfulness* is its greatest hatefulness, Rom. vii. 13. God has *set his laws before us* plainly and fully, as the copy we should write after, yet *we have not walked in them*, but turned aside, or turned back. 2. That they had slighted the fair warnings God had given them by the prophets, which in every age he had sent to them, *rising up betimes and sending them* (v. 6): "*We have not hearkened to thy servants the prophets, who have put us in mind of thy laws, and of the sanctions of them; though they spoke in thy name, we have not regarded them; though they delivered their message faithfully, with a universal respect to all orders and degrees of men, to our kings and princes, whom they had the courage and confidence to speak to, to our fathers, and to all the people of the land, whom they had the condescension and compassion to speak to, yet we have not hearkened to them, nor heard them, or not heeded them, or not complied with them.*" Mocking God's messengers, and despising his words, were Jerusalem's measure-filling sins, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. This confession of sin is repeated here, and much insisted on; penitents should again and again accuse and reproach themselves till they find their hearts thoroughly broken. *All Israel have transgressed thy law*, v. 11. It is Israel, God's professing people, who have known better, and from whom better is expected—

Israel, God's peculiar people, whom he has surrounded with his favours; not here and there one, but it is *all* Israel, the generality of them, the body of the people, that *have transgressed by departing* and getting out of the way, *that they might not hear*, and so might not obey, *thy voice*. This disobedience is that which all true penitents do most sensibly charge upon themselves (v. 14): *We obeyed not his voice, and (v. 15) we have sinned, we have done wickedly*. Those that would find mercy must thus confess their sins.

III. Here is a self-abasing acknowledgment of the righteousness of God in all the judgments that were brought upon them; and it is evermore the way of true penitents thus to justify God, that he may be clear when he judges, and the sinner may bear all the blame. 1. He acknowledges that it was sin that plunged them in all these troubles. Israel is *dispersed through all the countries* about, and so weakened, impoverished, and exposed. God's hand has *driven them* hither and thither, some *near*, where they are known and therefore the more ashamed, others *afar off*, where they are not known and therefore the more abandoned, and it is *because of their trespass that they have trespassed* (v. 7); they mingled themselves with the nations that they might be debauched by them, and now God mingles them with the nations that they might be stripped by them. 2. He owns the righteousness of God in it, that he had done them no wrong in all he had brought upon them, but had dealt with them as they deserved (v. 7): "*O Lord! righteousness belongs to thee; we have no fault to find with thy providence, no exceptions to make against thy judgments, for (v. 14) the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he does, even in the sore calamities we are now under, for we obeyed not the words of his mouth, and therefore justly feel the weight of his hand.*" This seems to be borrowed from Lam. i. 18. 3. He takes notice of the fulfilling of the scripture in what was brought upon them. *In very faithfulness he afflicted them*; for it was according to the word which he had spoken. *The curse is poured upon us and the oath*, that is, the curse that was ratified by an oath in the law of Moses, v. 11. This further justifies God in their troubles, that he did but inflict the penalty of the law, which he had given them fair notice of. It was necessary for the preserving of the honour of God's veracity, and saving his government from contempt, that the threatenings of his word should be accomplished, otherwise they look but as bugbears, nay, they seem not at all frightful. "Therefore he has confirmed his words which he spoke against us because we broke his laws, and against our judges that judged us because they did not according to the duty of their place punish the breach of God's laws. He told them many a time that if they did not execute

justice, as terrors to evil-workers, he must and would take the work into his own hands; and now he has confirmed what he said by *bringing upon us a great evil*, in which the princes and judges themselves deeply shared. Note, It contributes very much to our profiting by the judgments of God's hand to observe how exactly they agree with the judgments of his mouth. 4. He aggravates the calamities they were in, lest they should seem, having been long used to them, to make light of them, and so to lose the benefit of the chastening of the Lord by despising it. "It is not some of the common troubles of life that we are complaining of, but that which has in it some special marks of divine displeasure; for *under the whole heaven has not been done as has been done upon Jerusalem*," v. 12. It is Jeremiah's lamentation in the name of the church, *Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?* which must suppose another similar question, *Was ever sin like unto my sin?* 5. He puts shame upon the whole nation, from the highest to the lowest; and if they will say *Amen* to his prayer, as it was fit they should if they would come in for a share in the benefit of it, they must all put their hand upon their mouth, and their mouth in the dust: "*To us belongs confusion of faces as at this day* (v. 7); we lie under the shame of the punishment *at this day*, and we ought to accommodate ourselves to it, and to accept of the punishment of our iniquity, for shame is our due." If Israel had retained their character, and had continued a holy people, they would have been *high above all nations in praise, and name, and honour* (Deut. xxvi. 19); but now that they have *sinned and done wickedly* confusion and disgrace belong to them, to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the inhabitants both of the country and of the city, for they have been all alike guilty before God; it belongs to all Israel, both to the two tribes, *that are near*, by the rivers of Babylon, and to the ten tribes, *that are afar off*, in the land of Assyria. "Confusion belongs not only to the common people of our land, but to our kings, our princes, and our fathers (v. 8), who should have set a better example, and have used their authority and influence for the checking of the threatening torrent of vice and profaneness." 6. He imputes the continuance of the judgment to their incorrigibility under it (v. 13, 14): "*All this evil has come upon us*, and has lain long upon us, *yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God*, not in a right manner, as we should have made it, *with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart*. We have been smitten, but have not returned to him that smote us. *We have not entreated the face of the Lord our God* (so the word is); "we have taken no care to make our peace with God and reconcile ourselves to him." Daniel set his brethren a good example of praying continually, but he was sorry to see how few



there were that followed his example; in their affliction it was expected that they would seek God early, but they sought him not, that they might turn from their iniquities and understand his truth. The errand upon which afflictions are sent is to bring men to turn from their iniquities and to understand God's truth; so Elihu had explained them, Job xxxvi. 10. God by them opens men's ears to discipline and commands that they return from iniquity. And if men were brought rightly to understand God's truth, and to submit to the power and authority of it, they would turn from the error of their ways. Now the first step towards this is to make our prayer before the Lord our God, that the affliction may be sanctified before it is removed, and that the grace of God may go along with the providence of God, to make it answer the end. Those who in their affliction make not their prayer to God, who cry not when he binds them, are not likely to turn from iniquity or to understand his truth. "Therefore, because we have not improved the affliction, the Lord has watched upon the evil, as the judge takes care that execution be done according to the sentence. Because we have not been melted, he has kept us still in the furnace, and watched over it, to make the heat yet more intense;" for when God judges he will overcome, and will be justified in all his proceedings.

IV. Here is a believing appeal to the mercy of God, and to the ancient tokens of his favour to Israel, and the concern of his own glory in their interests. 1. It is some comfort to them (and not a little) that God has been always ready to pardon sin (v. 9): *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses*; this refers to that proclamation of his name, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, *The Lord God, gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity*. Note, It is very encouraging to poor sinners to recollect that mercies belong to God, as it is convincing and humbling to them to recollect that righteousness belongs to him; and those who give him the glory of his righteousness may take to themselves the comfort of his mercies, Ps. lxii. 12. There are abundant mercies in God, and not only forgiveness but forgivenesses; he is a God of pardons (Neh. ix. 17, marg.); he multiplies to pardon, Isa. lv. 7. *Though we have rebelled against him, yet with him there is mercy, pardoning mercy, even for the rebellious*. 2. It is likewise a support to them to think that God had formerly glorified himself by delivering them out of Egypt; so far he looks back for the encouragement of his faith (v. 15): "*Thou hast formerly brought thy people out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and wilt thou not now with the same mighty hand bring them out of Babylon? Were they then formed into a people, and shall they not now be reformed and new-formed? Are they now sinful and unworthy, and were they not so then? Are their oppressors now*

mighty and haughty, and were they not so then? And has not God said that their deliverance out of Babylon shall outshine even that out of Egypt?" Jer. xvi. 14, 15. The force of this plea lies in that, "*Thou hast gotten thyself renown, hast made thyself a name*" (so the word is) "*as at this day, even to this day, by bringing us out of Egypt; and wilt thou lose the credit of that by letting us perish in Babylon? Didst thou get a renown by that deliverance which we have so often commemorated, and wilt thou not now get thyself a renown by this which we have so often prayed for, and so long waited for?*"

V. Here is a pathetic complaint of the reproach that God's people lay under, and the ruins that God's sanctuary lay in, both which redounded very much to the dishonour of God and the diminution of that name and renown which God had gained by bringing them out of Egypt. 1. God's holy people were despised. *By their sins and the iniquities of their fathers* they had profaned their crown and made themselves despicable, and then though they are, in name and profession, God's people, and upon that account truly great and honourable, yet they become a reproach to all that are round about them. Their neighbours laugh them to scorn, and triumph in their disgrace. Note, Sin is a reproach to any people, but especially to God's people, that have more eyes upon them and have more honour to lose than other people. 2. God's holy place was desolate. Jerusalem, the holy city, was a reproach (v. 16) when it lay in ruins; it was an astonishment and a hissing to all that passed by. The sanctuary, the holy house, was desolate (v. 17), the altars were demolished, and all the buildings laid in ashes. Note, The desolations of the sanctuary are the grief of all the saints, who reckon all their comforts in this world buried in the ruins of the sanctuary.

VI. Here is an importunate request to God for the restoring of the poor captive Jews to their former enjoyments again. The petition is very pressing, for God gives us leave in prayer to wrestle with him: "*O Lord! I beseech thee, v. 16. If ever thou wilt do any thing for me, do this; it is my heart's desire and prayer. Now therefore, O our God! hear the prayer of thy servant and his supplication (v. 17), and grant an answer of peace.*" Now what are his petitions? What are his requests? 1. That God would turn away his wrath from them; that is it which all the saints dread and deprecate more than any thing: *O let thy anger be turned away from thy Jerusalem, thy holy mountain! v. 16. He does not pray for the turning again of their captivity (let the Lord do with them as seems good in his eyes), but he prays first for the turning away of God's wrath. Take away the cause, and the effect will cease. 2. That he would lift up the light of his countenance upon them (v. 17): "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate; return*

in mercy to us, and show that thou art reconciled to us, and then all shall be well." Note, The shining of God's face upon the desolations of the sanctuary is all in all towards the repair of it; and upon that foundation it must be rebuilt. If therefore its friends would begin their work at the right end, they must first be earnest with God in prayer for his favour, and recommend his desolate sanctuary to his smiles. *Cause thy face to shine and then we shall be saved*, Ps. lxxx. 3. 3. That he would forgive their sins, and then hasten their deliverance (v. 19): *O Lord! hear; O Lord! forgive*. "That the mercy prayed for may be granted in mercy, let the sin that threatens to come between us and it be removed: *O Lord! hearken and do, not hearken and speak only, but hearken and do; do that for us which none else can, and that speedily—defer not, O my God!*" Now that he saw the appointed day approaching he could in faith pray that God would make haste to them and not defer. David often prays, *Make haste, O God! to help me*.

VII. Here are several pleas and arguments to enforce the petitions. God gives us leave not only to pray, but to plead with him, which is not to move him (he himself knows what he will do), but to move ourselves, to excite our fervency and encourage our faith. 1. They disdain a dependence upon any righteousness of their own; they pretend not to merit any thing at God's hand but wrath and the curse (v. 18): "*We do not present our supplications before thee with hope to speed for our righteousness, as if we were worthy to receive thy favour for any good in us, or done by us, or could demand any thing as a debt; we cannot insist upon our own justification, no, though we were more righteous than we are; nay, though we knew nothing amiss of ourselves, yet are we not thereby justified, nor would we answer, but we would make supplication to our Judge.*" Moses had told Israel long before that, whatever God did for them, it was *not for their righteousness*, Deut. ix. 4, 5. And Ezekiel had of late told them that their return out of Babylon would be *not for their sakes*, Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32. Note, Whenever we come to God for mercy we must lay aside all conceit of, and confidence in, our own righteousness. 2. They take their encouragement in prayer from God only, as knowing that his reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself, and therefore from him we must borrow all our pleas for mercy, and so give honour to him when we are sung for grace and mercy from him. (1.) "*Do it for thy own sake* (v. 19), for the accomplishment of thy own counsel, the performance of thy own promise, and the manifestation of thy own glory." Note, God will do his own work, not only in his own way and time, but for his own sake, and so we must take it. (2.) "*Do it for the Lord's sake*, that is,

for the Lord Christ's sake," for the sake of the Messiah promised, who is the Lord (so the most and best of our Christian interpreters understand it), *for the sake of Adonai*, so David called the Messiah (Ps. cx. 1), and mercy is prayed for for the church for the sake of the *Son of man* (Ps. lxxx. 17), and *for thy Word's sake*, 2 Sam. vii. 21. Note, Christ is the Lord; he is Lord of all. It is for his sake that God causes his face to shine upon sinners when they repent and turn to him, because of the satisfaction he has made. In all our prayers that therefore must be our plea; we must *make mention of his righteousness, even of his only*, Ps. lxxi. 16. *Look upon the face of the anointed*. He has himself directed us to *ask in his name*. (3.) "*Do it according to all thy righteousness* (v. 16), that is, plead for us against our persecutors and oppressors *according to thy righteousness*. Though we are ourselves unrighteous before God, yet with reference to them we have a righteous cause, which we leave it with the righteous God to appear in the defence of." Or, rather, by the *righteousness of God* here is meant his faithfulness to his promise. God had, *according to his righteousness*, executed the threatening, v. 11. "Now, Lord, wilt thou not do according to *all thy righteousness*? Wilt thou not be as true to thy promises as thou hast been to thy threatenings and accomplish them also?" (4.) "*Do it for thy great mercies* (v. 18), to make it to appear that thou art a merciful God." The good things we ask of God we call *mercies*, because we expect them purely from God's mercy. And, because misery is the proper object of mercy, the prophet here spreads the deplorable condition of the church before God, as it were to move his compassion: "*Open thy eyes and behold our desolations, especially the desolations of the sanctuary. O look with pity upon a pitiable case!*" Note, The desolations of the church must in prayer be laid before God and then left with him. (5.) "*Do it for the sake of the relation we stand in to thee*. The sanctuary that is desolate is thy sanctuary (v. 17), dedicated to thy honour, employed in thy service, and the place of thy residence. Jerusalem is *thy city* and *thy holy mountain* (v. 16); it is *the city which is called by thy name*," v. 18. It was the city which God had *chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there*. "The people that have become a reproach are *thy people*, and thy name suffers in the reproach cast upon them (v. 16); they are *called by thy name*, v. 19. Lord, thou hast a property in them, and therefore art interested in their interests; wilt thou not provide for thy own, for those of thy own house? They are *thine, save them*," Ps. cxix. 94.

20 And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and pre-



senting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; 21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. 22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. 23 At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. 24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. 25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

We have here the answer that was immediately sent to Daniel's prayer, and it is a very memorable one, as it contains the most illustrious prediction of Christ and gospel-grace that is extant in all the *Old Testament*. If John Baptist was the morning-star, this was the day-break to the Sun of righteousness, the day-spring from on high. Here is,

I. The time when this answer was given.

1. It was while Daniel was at prayer.

This he observed and laid a strong emphasis upon: *While I was speaking* (v. 20), yea, *while I was speaking in prayer* (v. 21), before he rose from his knees, and while there was yet more which he intended to say.

(1.) He mentions the two heads he chiefly insisted upon in prayer, and which perhaps he designed yet further to enlarge upon. [1.] He was confessing sin and lamenting that—"both my sin and the sin of my people Israel." Daniel was a very great and good man, and yet he finds sin of his own to confess before God and is ready to confess it; for there is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not, nor that sins and repents not. St. John puts himself into the number of those who deceive themselves if they say that they have no sin, and who therefore confess their sins, 1 John i. 8. Good men find it an ease to their consciences to pour out their complaints before the Lord against themselves; and that is confessing sin. He also confessed the sin of his people, and bewailed that. Those who are heartily concerned for the glory of God, the welfare of the church, and the souls of men, will mourn for the sins of others as well as for their own. [2.] He was making supplication before the Lord his God, and presenting it to him as an intercessor for Israel; and in this prayer his concern was for the holy mountain of his God, Mount Zion. The desolations of the sanctuary lay nearer his heart than those of the city and the land; and the repair of that, and the setting up of the public worship of the God of Israel again, were the things he had in view, in the deliverance he was preparing for, more than the re-establishment of their civil interests. Now,

(2.) While Daniel was thus employed, [1.] He had a grant made him of the mercy he prayed for. Note, God is very ready to hear prayer and to give an answer of peace. Now was fulfilled what God had spoken Isa. lxxv. 24, *While they are yet speaking, I will hear*. Daniel grew very fervent in prayer, and his affections were very strong, v. 18, 19. And, while he was speaking with such fervour and ardency, the angel came to him with a gracious answer. God is well pleased with lively devotions. We cannot now expect that God should send us answers to our prayer by angels, but, if we pray with fervency for that which God has promised, we may by faith take the promise as an immediate answer to the prayer; for he is faithful that has promised. [2.] He had a discovery made to him of a far greater and more glorious redemption which God would work out for his church in the latter days. Note, Those that would be brought acquainted with Christ and his grace must be much in prayer.

2. It was about the time of the evening oblation, v. 21. The altar was in ruins, and there was no oblation offered upon it, but, it should seem, the pious Jews in their captivity were daily thoughtful of the time when

it should have been offered, and at that hour were ready to weep at the remembrance of it and desired and hoped that their prayer should be *set forth before God as incense*, and the *lifting up of their hands*, and their hearts with their hands, should be acceptable in his sight as *the evening-sacrifice*, Ps. cxli. 2. The evening oblation was a type of the great sacrifice which Christ was to offer in the evening of the world, and it was in the virtue of that sacrifice that Daniel's prayer was accepted when he prayed *for the Lord's sake*; and for the sake of that this glorious discovery of redeeming love was made to him. The Lamb *opened the seals* in the virtue of his own blood.

II. The messenger by whom this answer was sent. It was not given him in a dream, nor by a voice from heaven, but, for the greater certainty and solemnity of it, an angel was sent on purpose, appearing in a human shape, to give this answer to Daniel. Observe,

1. Who this angel, or messenger, was; it was *the man Gabriel*. If Michael the archangel be, as many suppose, no other than Jesus Christ, this Gabriel is the only created angel that is named in scripture. Gabriel signifies the *mighty one of God*; for the angels are *great in power and might*, 2 Pet. ii. 11. It was *he whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning*. Daniel heard him called by his name, and thence learned it (Dan. viii. 16); and, though then he trembled at his approach, yet he observed him so carefully that now he knew him again, knew him to be the same that he had seen at the beginning, and, being somewhat better acquainted with him, was not now so terrified at the sight of him as he had been at first. When this angel said to *Zacharias, I am Gabriel* (Luke i. 19); he intended thereby to put him in mind of this notice which he had given to Daniel of the Messiah's coming when it was at a distance, for the confirming of his faith in the notice he was then about to give of it as at the door.

2. The instructions which this messenger received from the Father of lights to whom Daniel prayed (v. 23): *At the beginning of thy supplications the word, the commandment, came forth from God*. Notice was given to the angels in heaven of this counsel of God, which they were desirous to look into; and orders were given to Gabriel to go immediately and bring the notice of it to Daniel. By this it appears that it was not any thing which Daniel said that moved God, for the answer was given as he began to pray; but God was well pleased with his serious solemn address to the duty, and, in token of that, sent him this gracious message. Or perhaps it was *at the beginning of Daniel's supplications* that *Cyrus's word, or commandment, went forth to restore and to build Jerusalem*, that going forth spoken of v. 25. "The thing was done *this very day*; the pro-

clamation of liberty to the Jews was signed this morning, just when thou wast praying for it;" and now, at the close of this fast-day, Daniel had notice of it, as, at the close of the *day of atonement*, the jubilee-trumpet sounded to proclaim liberty.

3. The haste he made to deliver his message: He was *caused to fly swiftly*, v. 21. Angels are winged messengers, quick in their motions, and delay not to execute the orders they receive; they run and *return like a flash of lightning*, Ezek. i. 14. But, it should seem, sometimes they are more expeditious than at other times, and make a quicker despatch, as here the angel was *caused to fly swiftly*: that is, he was ordered and he was enabled to fly swiftly. Angels do their work in obedience to divine command and in dependence upon divine strength. Though they excel in wisdom, they fly swifter or slower as God directs; and, though they excel in power, they fly but as God causes them to fly. Angels themselves are to us what he makes them to be; they are *his ministers, and do his pleasure*, Ps. ciii. 21.

4. The prefaces or introductions to his message. (1.) He *touched him* (v. 21), as before (ch. viii. 18), not to awaken him out of sleep as then, but to give him a hint to break off his prayer and to attend to that which he has to say in answer to it. Note, In order to the keeping up of our communion with God we must not only be forward to speak to God, but as forward to hear what he has to say to us; when we have prayed we must look up, must look after our prayers, must set ourselves upon our watch-tower. (2.) He *talked with him* (v. 22), talked familiarly with him, as one friend talks with another, that *his terror might not make him afraid*. He informed him on what errand he came, that he was sent from heaven on purpose with a kind message to him: "*I have come to show thee* (v. 23), to tell thee that which thou didst not know before." He had shown him the troubles of the church under Antiochus, and the period of those troubles (ch. viii. 19); but now he has greater things to show him, for he that is faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more. "Nay, *I have now come forth to give thee skill and understanding* (v. 22), not only to show thee these things, but to *make thee understand* them." (3.) He assured him that he was a favourite of Heaven, else he would not have had this intelligence sent him, and he must take it for a favour: "*I have come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved*. Thou art a man of desires, acceptable to God, and whom he has a favour for." Note, Though God loves all his children, yet there are some that are more than the rest *greatly beloved*. Christ had one disciple that lay in his bosom; and that *beloved disciple* was he that was entrusted with the prophetic visions of the New Testament, as Daniel was with those of the Old. For what greater token can there be of God's



favour to any man than for the secrets of the Lord to be with him? Abraham is the friend of God; and therefore *Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?* Gen. xviii. 17. Note, Those may reckon themselves greatly beloved of God to whom, and in whom, he reveals his Son. Some observe that the title which this angel Gabriel gives to the Virgin Mary is much the same with this which he here gives to Daniel, as if he designed to put her in mind of it—*Thou that art highly favoured; as Daniel, greatly beloved.* (4.) He demands his serious attention to the discovery he was now about to make to him: *Therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision, v. 23.* This intimates that it was a thing well worthy of his regard, above any of the visions he had been before favoured with. Note, Those who would understand the things of God must consider them, must apply their minds to them, ponder upon them, and compare spiritual things with spiritual. The reason why we are so much in the dark concerning the revealed will of God, and mistake concerning it, is want of consideration. This vision both requires and deserves consideration.

III. The message itself. It was delivered with great solemnity, received no doubt with great attention, and recorded with great exactness; but in it, as is usual in prophecies, there are things dark and hard to be understood. Daniel, who understood by the book of the prophet Jeremiah the expiration of the seventy years of the captivity, is now honourably employed to make known to the church another more glorious release, which that was but a shadow of, at the end of another seventy, not years, but weeks of years. He prayed over that prophecy, and received this in answer to that prayer. He had prayed for his people and the holy city—that they might be released, that it might be rebuilt; but God answers him *above what he was able to ask or think.* God not only grants, but outdoes, the desires of those that fear him, Ps. xxi. 4.

1. The times here determined are somewhat hard to be understood. In general, it is *seventy weeks*, that is, *seventy times seven years*, which makes just 490 years. The great affairs that are yet to come concerning the people of Israel, and the city of Jerusalem, will lie within the compass of these years.

(1.) These years are thus described by weeks, [1.] In conformity to the prophetic style, which is, for the most part, abstruse, and out of the common road of speaking, that the things foretold might not lie too obvious. [2.] To put an honour upon the division of time into weeks, which is made purely by the sabbath day, and to signify that that should be perpetual. [3.] With reference to the seventy years of the captivity; as they had been so long kept out of the possession of their own land, so, being now restored to it they should seven times as long be kept

in the possession of it. So much more does God delight in showing mercy than in punishing. The land had *enjoyed its sabbaths*, in a melancholy sense, seventy years, Lev. xxvi. 34. But now the people of the Lord shall, in a comfortable sense, enjoy their sabbaths seven times seventy years, and in them seventy sabbatical years, which makes ten jubilees. Such proportions are there in the disposals of Providence, that we might see and admire the wisdom of him who has *determined the times before appointed.*

(2.) The difficulties that arise about these seventy weeks are, [1.] Concerning the time when they commence and whence they are to be reckoned. They are here dated from the *going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, v. 25.* I should most incline to understand this of the edict of Cyrus mentioned Ezra i. 1, for by it the people were *restored*; and, though express mention be not made there of the building of Jerusalem, yet that is supposed in the building of the temple, and was foretold to be done by Cyrus, Isa. xlv. 28. He shall *say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built.* That was, both in prophecy and in history, the most famous decree for the building of Jerusalem; nay, it should seem, this *going forth of the commandment* (which may as well be meant of God's command concerning it as of Cyrus's) is the same with that going forth of the commandment mentioned v. 23, which was *at the beginning of Daniel's supplications.* And it looks very graceful that the seventy weeks should begin immediately upon the expiration of these seventy years. And there is nothing to be objected against this but that by this reckoning the *Persian monarchy*, from the taking of Babylon by Cyrus to Alexander's conquest of Darius, lasted but 130 years; whereas, by the particular account given of the reigns of the Persian emperors, it is computed that it continued 230 years. So Thucydides, Xenophon, and others reckon. Those who fix it to that first edict set aside these computations of the heathen historians as uncertain and not to be relied upon. But others, willing to reconcile them, begin the 490 years, not at the edict of Cyrus (Ezra i. 1), but at the second edict for the building of Jerusalem, issued out by Darius Nothus above 100 years after, mentioned Ezra vi. Others fix on the seventh year of Artaxerxes Mnemon, who sent Ezra with a commission, Ezra vii. 8—12. The learned Mr. Poole, in his Latin Synopsis, has a vast and most elaborate collection of what has been said, *pro and con*, concerning the different beginnings of these weeks, with which the learned may entertain themselves. [2.] Concerning the termination of them; and here likewise interpreters are not agreed. Some make them to end at the death of Christ, and think the express words of this famous prophecy will warrant us to conclude that from this very hour when Gabriel spoke

to Daniel, at the time of the evening oblation, to the hour when Christ died, which was towards evening too, it was exactly 490 years; and I am willing enough to be of that opinion. But others think, because it is said that *in the midst of the weeks* (that is, the last of the seventy weeks) *he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease*, they end *three years and a half* after the death of Christ, when, the Jews having rejected the gospel, the apostles turned to the Gentiles. But those who make them to end precisely at the death of Christ read it thus, "He shall *make strong the testament to the many: the last seven, or the last week, yea, half that seven, or half that week* (namely, the latter half, the three years and a half which Christ spent in his public ministry), shall bring to an end sacrifice and oblation." Others make these 490 years to end with the destruction of Jerusalem, about thirty-seven years after the death of Christ, because these seventy weeks are said to be *determined upon the people of the Jews and the holy city*; and much is said here concerning the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. [3.] Concerning the division of them into seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks, and one week; and the reason of this is as hard to account for as any thing else. In the first seven weeks, or forty-nine years, the temple and city were built; and in the last single week Christ preached his gospel, by which the Jewish economy was taken down, and the foundations were laid of the gospel city and temple, which were to be built upon the ruins of the former.

(3.) But, whatever uncertainty we may labour under concerning the exact fixing of these times, there is enough clear and certain to answer the two great ends of determining them. [1.] It did serve them to raise and support the expectations of believers. There were general promises of the coming of the Messiah made to the patriarchs; the preceding prophets had often spoken of him as *one that should come*, but never was the time fixed for his coming until now. And, though there might be so much doubt concerning the date of this reckoning that they could not ascertain the time just to a year, yet by the light of this prophecy they were directed about what time to expect him. And we find, accordingly, that when Christ came he was generally *looked for as the consolation of Israel, and redemption in Jerusalem* by him, Luke ii. 25, 38. There were those that for this reason thought the *kingdom of God should immediately appear* (Luke xix. 11), and some think it was this that brought a more than ordinary concourse of people to Jerusalem, Acts ii. 5. [2.] It does serve still to refute and silence the expectations of unbelievers, who will not own that Jesus is he who *should come*, but still *look for another*. This prediction should silence them, and will condemn them; for, reckon these seventy weeks from which of the com-

mandments to build Jerusalem we please, it is certain that they have expired above 1500 years ago; so that the Jews are for ever *without excuse*, who will not own that the Messiah has come when they have gone so far beyond their utmost reckoning for his coming. But by this we are confirmed in our belief of the Messiah's being come, and that our Jesus is he, that he came just at the time prefixed, a time worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance.

2. The events here foretold are more plain and easy to be understood, at least to us now. Observe what is here foretold,

(1.) Concerning the return of the Jews now speedily to their own land, and their settlement again there, which was the thing that Daniel now principally prayed for; and yet it is but briefly touched upon here in the answer to his prayer. Let this be a comfort to the pious Jews, that a *commandment shall go forth to restore and to build Jerusalem*, v. 25. And the commandment shall not be in vain; for though the times will be very troublous, and this good work will meet with great opposition, yet it shall be carried on, and brought to perfection at last. *The street shall be built again*, as spacious and splendid as ever it was, and *the walls, even in troublous times*. Note, as long as we are here in this world we must expect *troublous times*, upon some account or other. Even when we have *joyous times* we must rejoice with trembling; it is but a gleam, it is but a lucid interval of peace and prosperity; the clouds will *return after the rain*. When the Jews are restored in triumph to their own land, yet there they must expect troublous times, and prepare for them. But this is our comfort, that God will carry on his own work, will build up his Jerusalem, will beautify it, will fortify it, *even in troublous times*; nay, the troublousness of the times may by the grace of God contribute to the advancement of the church. The more it is afflicted the more it multiplies.

(2.) Concerning the Messiah and his undertaking. The carnal Jews looked for a Messiah that should deliver them from the Roman yoke and give them temporal power and wealth, whereas they were here told that the Messiah should come upon another errand, purely spiritual, and upon the account of which he should be the more welcome. [1.] Christ came to *take away sin*, and to abolish that. Sin had made a quarrel between God and man, had alienated man from God and provoked God against man; it was this that put dishonour upon God and brought misery upon mankind; this was the great mischief-maker. He that would do God a real service, and man a real kindness, must be the destruction of this. Christ undertakes to be so, and for *this purpose* he is *manifested, to destroy the works of the devil*. He does not say to *finish your transgressions* and your sins, but *transgression and sin* in



general, for he is the propitiation not only for our sins, that are Jews, but for the sins of the whole world." He came, First, To finish transgression, to restrain it (so some), to break the power of it, to bruise the head of that serpent that had done so much mischief, to take away the usurped dominion of that tyrant, and to set up a kingdom of holiness and love in the hearts of men, upon the ruins of Satan's kingdom there, that, where sin and death had reigned, righteousness and life through grace might reign. When he died he said, *It is finished*; sin has now had its death-wound given it, like Samson's, *Let me die with the Philistines. Animamque in vulnere ponit—He inflicts the wound and dies.* Secondly, To make an end of sin, to abolish it, that it may not rise up in judgment against us, to obtain the pardon of it, that it may not be our ruin, to seal up sins (so the margin reads it), that they may not appear or break out against us, to accuse and condemn us, as, when Christ cast the devil into the bottomless pit, he set a seal upon him, Rev. xx. 3. When sin is pardoned it is sought for and not found, as that which is sealed up. Thirdly, To make reconciliation for iniquity, as by a sacrifice, to satisfy the justice of God and so to make peace and bring God and man together, not only as an arbitrator, or referee, who only brings the contending parties to a good understanding one of another, but as a surety, or undertaker, for us. He is not only the peace-maker, but the peace. He is the atonement. [2.] He came to bring in an everlasting righteousness. God might justly have made an end of the sin by making an end of the sinner; but Christ found out another way, and so made an end of sin as to save the sinner from it, by providing a righteousness for him. We are all guilty before God, and shall be condemned as guilty, if we have not a righteousness wherein to appear before him. Had we stood, our innocency would have been our righteousness, but, having fallen, we must have something else to plead; and Christ has provided us a plea. The merit of his sacrifice is our righteousness; with this we answer all the demands of the law: *Christ has died, yea, rather, has risen again.* Thus Christ is the Lord our righteousness, for he is made of God to us righteousness, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. By faith we apply this to ourselves and plead it with God, and our faith is imputed to us for righteousness, Rom. iv. 3, 5. This is an everlasting righteousness, for Christ, who is our righteousness, and the prince of our peace, is the everlasting Father. It was from everlasting in the counsels of it and will be to everlasting in the consequences of it. The application of it was from the beginning, for Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and it will be to the end, for he is able to save to the uttermost. It is of everlasting

virtue (Heb. x. 12); it is the rock that follows us to Canaan. [3.] He came to seal up the vision and prophecy, all the prophetic visions of the Old Testament, which had reference to the Messiah. He sealed them up, that is, he accomplished them, answered to them to a tittle; all things that were written in the law, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning the Messiah, were fulfilled in him. Thus he confirmed the truth of them as well as his own mission. He sealed them up, that is, he put an end to that method of God's discovering his mind and will, and took another course by completing the scripture-canon in the New Testament, which is the more sure word of prophecy than that by vision, 2 Pet. i. 19; Heb. i. 1. [4.] He came to anoint the most holy, that is, himself, the Holy One, who was anointed (that is, appointed to his work and qualified for it) by the Holy Ghost, that oil of gladness which he received without measure, above his fellows; or to anoint the gospel-church, his spiritual temple, or holy place, to sanctify and cleanse it, and appropriate it to himself (Eph. v. 26), or to consecrate for us a new and living way into the holiest, by his own blood (Heb. x. 20), as the sanctuary was anointed, Exod. xxx. 25, &c. He is called Messiah (v. 25, 26), which signifies Christ—Anointed (John i. 41), because he received the unction both for himself and for all that are his. [5.] In order to all this the Messiah must be cut off, must die a violent death, and so be cut off from the land of the living, as was foretold, Isa. liii. 8. Hence, when Paul preaches the death of Christ, he says that he preached nothing but what the prophet said should come, Acts xxvi. 22, 23. And thus it behoved Christ to suffer. He must be cut off, but not for himself—not for any sin of his own, but, as Caiaphas prophesied, he must die for the people, in our stead and for our good,—not for any advantage of his own (the glory he purchased for himself was no more than the glory he had before, John xvii. 4, 5); no; it was to atone for our sins, and to purchase life for us, that he was cut off. [6.] He must confirm the covenant with many. He shall introduce a new covenant between God and man, a covenant of grace, since it had become impossible for us to be saved by a covenant of innocence. This covenant he shall confirm by his doctrine and miracles, by his death and resurrection, by the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, which are the seals of the New Testament, assuring us that God is willing to accept us upon gospel-terms. His death made his testament of force, and enabled us to claim what is bequeathed by it. He confirmed it to the many, to the common people; the poor were evangelized, when the rulers and Pharisees believed not on him. Or, he confirmed it with many, with the Gentile world. The New Testament was not (like the Old) confined to the Jewish



church, but was committed to all nations. Christ gave his life a ransom for many. [7.] He must cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease. By offering himself a sacrifice once for all he shall put an end to all the Levitical sacrifices, shall supersede them and set them aside; when the substance comes the shadows shall be done away. He causes all the peace-offerings to cease when he has made peace by the blood of his cross, and by it confirmed the covenant of peace and reconciliation. By the preaching of his gospel to the world, with which the apostles were entrusted, he took men off from expecting remission by the blood of bulls and goats, and so caused the sacrifice and oblation to cease. The apostle in his epistle to the Hebrews shows what a better priesthood, altar, and sacrifice, we have now than they had under the law, as a reason why we should hold fast our profession.

(3.) Concerning the final destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish church and nation; and this follows immediately upon the cutting off of the Messiah, not only because it was the just punishment of those that put him to death, which was the sin that filled up the measure of their iniquity and brought ruin upon them, but because, as things were, it was necessary to the perfecting of one of the great intentions of his death. He died to take away the ceremonial law, quite to abolish that law of commandments, and to vacate the obligation of it. But the Jews would not be persuaded to quit it; still they kept it up with more zeal than ever; they would hear no talk of parting with it; they stoned Stephen (the first Christian martyr) for saying that Jesus should change the customs which Moses delivered them (Acts vi. 14); so that there was no way to abolish the Mosaic economy but by destroying the temple, and the holy city, and the Levitical priesthood, and that whole nation which so incurably doted on them. This was effectually done in less than forty years after the death of Christ, and it was a desolation that could never be repaired to this day. And this is it which is here largely foretold, that the Jews who returned out of captivity might not be overmuch lifted up with the rebuilding of their city and temple, because in process of time they would be finally destroyed, and not as now for seventy years only, but might rather rejoice in hope of the coming of the Messiah, and the setting up of his spiritual kingdom in the world, which should never be destroyed. Now, [1.] It is here foretold that the people of the prince that shall come shall be the instruments of this destruction, that is, the Roman armies, belonging to a monarchy yet to come (Christ is the prince that shall come, and they are employed by him in this service; they are his armies, Matt. xxii. 7), or the Gentiles (who, though now strangers, shall become the people of the Messiah) shall destroy the Jews. [2.]

That the destruction shall be by war, and the end of that war shall be this desolation determined. The wars of the Jews with the Romans were by their own obstinacy made very long and very bloody, and they issued at length in the utter extirpation of that people. [3.] That the city and sanctuary shall in a particular manner be destroyed and laid quite waste. Titus the Roman general would fain have saved the temple, but his soldiers were so enraged against the Jews that he could not restrain them from burning it to the ground, that this prophecy might be fulfilled. [4.] That all the resistance that shall be made to this destruction shall be in vain: The end of it shall be with a flood. It shall be a deluge of destruction, like that which swept away the old world, and which there will be no making head against. [5.] That hereby the sacrifice and oblation shall be made to cease. And it must needs cease when the family of the priests was so extirpated, and the genealogies of it were so confounded, that (they say) there is no man in the world that can prove himself of the seed of Aaron. [6.] That there shall be an overspreading of abominations, a general corruption of the Jewish nation and an abounding of iniquity among them, for which it shall be made desolate, 1 Thess. ii. 16. Or it is rather to be understood of the armies of the Romans, which were abominable to the Jews (they could not endure them), which overspread the nation, and by which it was made desolate; for these are the words which Christ refers to, Matt. xxiv. 15, When you shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel, stand in the holy place, then let those who shall be in Judea flee, which is explained Luke xxi. 20, When you shall see Jerusalem encompassed with armies then flee. [7.] That the desolation shall be total and final: He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, that is, he shall make it completely desolate. It is a desolation determined, and it will be accomplished to the utmost. And when it is made desolate, it should seem, there is something more determined that is to be poured upon the desolate (v. 27), and what should that be but the spirit of slumber (Rom. xi. 8, 25), that blindness which has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in? And then all Israel shall be saved.

## CHAP. X.

This chapter and the two next (which conclude this book) make up one entire vision and prophecy, which was communicated to Daniel for the use of the church, not by signs and figures, as before (ch. vii. and viii.), but by express words; and this was about two years after the vision in the foregoing chapter. Daniel prayed daily, but had a vision only now and then. In this chapter we have some things introductory to the prophecy, in the eleventh chapter the particular predictions, and ch. xii. the conclusion of it. This chapter shows us, I. Daniel's solemn fasting and humiliation, before he had this vision, ver. 1-3. II. A glorious appearance of the Son of God to him, and the deep impression it made upon him, ver. 4-9. III. The encouragement that was given him to expect such a discovery of future events as should be satisfactory and useful both to others and to himself, and that he should be enabled both to understand the meaning of this discovery, though difficult, and to bear up under the lustre of it, though dazzling and dreadful, ver. 10-21.



**I**N the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing *was* true, but the time appointed *was* long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. 4 And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which *is* Hiddekel; 5 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins *were* girded with fine gold of Uphaz: 6 His body also *was* like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. 7 And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. 8 Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. 9 Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

This vision is dated in the *third year of Cyrus*, that is, of his reign after the conquest of Babylon, his third year since Daniel became acquainted with him and a subject to him. Here is,

I. A general idea of this prophecy (v. 1): *The thing was true*; every word of God is so; it was true that Daniel had such a vision, and that such and such things were said. This he solemnly attests upon the word of a prophet. *Et hoc paratus est verificare—He was prepared to verify it*; and, if it was a word *spoken from heaven*, no doubt it is steadfast and may be depended upon. *But the time appointed was long*, as long as to the end of the reign of Antiochus, which was 300 years, a long time indeed when it is looked upon as to come. Nay, and because it is usual with the prophets to glance at things

spiritual and eternal, there is that in this prophecy which looks in type as far forward as to the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead; and then he might well say, *The time appointed was long*. It was, however, made as plain to him as if it had been a history rather than a prophecy; he *understood the thing*; so distinctly was it delivered to him, and received by him, that he could say he *had understanding of the vision*. It did not so much operate upon his fancy as upon his understanding.

II. An account of Daniel's mortification of himself before he had this vision, not in expectation of it, nor, when he prayed that solemn prayer *ch. ix.*, does it appear that he had any expectation of the vision in answer to it, but purely from a principle of devotion and pious sympathy with the afflicted people of God. *He was mourning full three weeks* (v. 2), for his own sins and the sins of his people, and their sorrows. Some think that the particular occasion of his mourning was the slothfulness and indifference of many of the Jews, who, though they had liberty to return to their own land, continued still in the land of their captivity, not knowing how to value the privileges offered them; and perhaps it troubled him the more because those that did so justified themselves by the example of Daniel, though they had not that reason to stay behind which he had. Others think that it was because he heard of the obstruction given to the building of the temple by the enemies of the Jews, who *hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose* (Ezra iv. 4, 5), *all the days of Cyrus*, and gained their point from his son Cambyses, or Artaxerxes, who governed while Cyrus was absent in the Scythian war. Note, Good men cannot but mourn to see how slowly the work of God goes on in the world and what opposition it meets with, how weak its friends are and how active its enemies. During the days of Daniel's mourning he *ate no pleasant bread*; he could not live without meat, but he ate little, and very sparingly, and mortified himself in the quality as well as the quantity of what he ate, which may truly be reckoned fasting, and a token of humiliation and sorrow. He did not eat the pleasant bread he used to eat, but that which was coarse and unpalatable, which he would not be tempted to eat any more of than was just necessary to support nature. As ornaments, so delicacies, are very disagreeable to a day of humiliation. *Daniel ate no flesh, drank no wine, nor anointed himself*, for these three weeks' time, v. 3. Though he was now a very old man, and might plead that the decay of his nature required what was nourishing, though he was a very great man, and might plead that, being used to dainty meats, he could not do without them, it would prejudice his health if he were, yet, when it was both to testify and to assist his devotion, he could thus deny himself; let this

he noted to the shame of many young people in the common ranks of life who cannot persuade themselves thus to deny themselves.

III. A description of that glorious person whom Daniel saw in vision, which, it is generally agreed, could be no other than Christ himself, the eternal Word. He was by the side of the river Hiddekel (v. 4), probably walking there, not for diversion, but devotion and contemplation, as Isaac walked in the field, to meditate; and, being a person of distinction, he had his servants attending him at some distance. There he *looked up*, and saw *one man*, one alone, *a certain man*, even the *man Christ Jesus*. It must be he, for he appears in the same resemblance wherein he appeared to St. John in the isle of Patmos, Rev. i. 13—15. His dress was priestly, for he is the high priest of our profession, *clothed in linen*, as the high priest himself was on the day of atonement, that great day; *his loins were girded* (in St. John's vision his *paps were girded*) *with a golden girdle* of the finest gold, that of Uphaz, for every thing about Christ is the best in its kind. The *girding of the loins* denotes his ready and diligent application to his work, as his Father's servant, in the business of our redemption. His shape was amiable, *his body like the beryl*, a precious stone of a sky-colour. His countenance was awful, and enough to strike a terror on the beholders, for his face was *as the appearance of lightning*, which dazzles the eyes, both frightens and threatens. His *eyes* were bright and sparkling, *as lamps of fire*. His *arms and feet shone like polished brass*, v. 6. His *voice* was loud, and strong, and very piercing, *like the voice of a multitude*. The *vox Dei*—voice of God can overpower the *vox populi*—voice of the people. Thus glorious did Christ appear, and it should engage us, 1. To think highly and honourably of him. *Now consider how great this man is*, and in all things let him have the pre-eminence. 2. To admire his condescension for us and our salvation. Over all this splendour he drew a veil when he took upon him the form of a servant, and *emptied himself*.

IV. The wonderful influence that this appearance had upon Daniel and his attendants, and the terror that it struck upon him and them.

1. His attendants *saw not the vision*; it was not fit that they should be honoured with the sight of it. There is a divine revelation vouchsafed to all, from converse with which none are excluded who do not exclude themselves; but such a vision must be peculiar to Daniel, who was a favourite. Paul's companions were aware of the *light*, but *saw no man*, Acts ix. 7; xxii. 9. Note, It is the honour of those who are beloved of God that, what is hidden from others, is known to them. Christ *manifests himself to them*, but *not to the world*, John xiv. 22. But, though they saw not the vision, they were

seized with an unaccountable trembling; either from the voice they heard, or from some strange concussion or vibration of the air they felt, so it was that *a great quaking fell upon them*, so that they fled to hide themselves, probably among the willows that grew by the river's side. Note, Many have a *spirit of bondage to fear* who never receive a *spirit of adoption*, to whom Christ has been, and will be, never otherwise than a terror. Now the fright that Daniel's attendants were in is a confirmation of the truth of the vision; it could not be Daniel's fancy, or the product of a heated imagination of his own, for it had a real, powerful, and strange effect upon those about him.

2. He himself saw it, and saw it alone, but he was not able to bear the sight of it. It not only dazzled his eyes, but overwhelmed his spirit, so that *there remained no strength in him*, v. 8. He said, as Moses himself, *I exceedingly fear and quake*. His spirits were all so employed, either in an intense speculation of the glory of this vision or in the fortifying of his heart against the terror of it, that his body was left in a manner lifeless and spiritless. He had no vigour in him, and was but one remove from a dead carcase; he looked as pale as death, his colour was gone, his *comeliness* in him was *turned into corruption*, and he *retained no strength*. Note, The greatest and best of men cannot bear the immediate discoveries of the divine glory; no man can see it and live; it is next to death to see a glimpse of it, as Daniel here; but glorified saints see Christ as he is and can bear the sight. But, though Daniel was thus dispirited with the vision of Christ, yet he *heard the voice of his words* and knew what he said. Note, We must take heed lest our reverence of God's glory, by which we should be awakened to hear his voice both in his word and in his providence, should degenerate into such a dread of him as will disable or indispose us to hear it. It should seem that when the vision of Christ terrified Daniel the voice of his words soon pacified and composed him, silenced his fear, and laid him to sleep in a holy security and serenity of mind: *When I heard the voice of his words I fell into a slumber*, a sweet slumber, *on my face, and my face towards the ground*. When he saw the vision he threw himself prostrate, into a posture of the most humble adoration, and dropped asleep, not as careless of what he heard and saw, but charmed with it. Note, How dreadful soever Christ may appear to those who are under convictions of sin, and in terror by reason of it, there is enough in his word to quiet their spirits and make them easy, if they will but attend to it and apply it.

10 And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. 11 And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man



greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. 12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. 14 Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days. 15 And when he had spoken such words unto me, I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb. 16 And, behold, *one* like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said unto him that stood before me, O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength. 17 For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me. 18 Then there came again and touched me *one* like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, 19 And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me. 20 Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. 21 But I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and *there is none* that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.

Much ado here is to bring Daniel to be able to bear what Christ has to say to him. Still we have him in a fright, hardly and very slowly recovering himself; but he is still

answered and supported with good words and comfortable words. Let us see how Daniel is by degrees brought to himself, and gather up the several passages that are to the same purport.

I. Daniel is in a great consternation and finds it very difficult to get clear of it. The hand that *touched him* set him at first upon *his knees and the palms of his hands*, v. 10. Note, Strength and comfort commonly come by degrees to those that have been long cast down and disquieted; they are first helped up a little, and then more. *After two days he will revive us, and then the third day he will raise us up.* And we must not despise the *day of small things*, but be thankful for the beginnings of mercy. Afterwards he is helped up, but he *stands trembling* (v. 11), for fear lest he fall again. Note, Before God gives strength and power unto his people he makes them sensible of their own weakness. *I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble*, Hab. iii. 16. But when, afterwards, Daniel recovered so much strength in his limbs that he could stand steadily, yet he tells us (v. 15) that he *set his face towards the ground and became dumb*; he was a man astonished, who knew not what to say, struck dumb with admiration and fear, and was loth to enter into discourse with one so far above him; he kept silence, yea, *even from good*, till he had recollected himself a little. Well, at length he recovered, not only the use of his feet, but the use of his tongue; and, when he *opened his mouth* (v. 16), that which he had to say was to excuse his having been so long silent, for really he durst not speak, he could not speak: "*O my lord*" (so, in great humility, this prophet calls the angel, though the angels, in great humility, called themselves *fellow-servants to the prophets*, Rev. xxii. 9), "*by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me*; they break in upon me with violence; the sense of my sinful sorrowful state turns upon me when I see thy purity and brightness." Note, Man, who has lost his integrity, has reason to blush, and be ashamed of himself, when he sees or considers the glory of the blessed angels that keep their integrity. "*My sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength* to resist them or bear up a head against them." And again (v. 17), like one half dead with the fright, he complains, "*As for me, straightway there remained no strength in me* to receive these displays of the divine glory and these discoveries of the divine will; nay, *there is no breath left in me.*" Such a *deliquium* did he suffer that he could not draw one breath after another, but panted and languished, and was in a manner breathless. See how well it is for us that the treasure of divine revelation is put into *earthen vessels*, that God speaks to us by men like ourselves and not by angels.

Whatever we may wish, in a peevish dislike of the method God takes in dealing with us, it is certain that if we were tried we should



all be of Israel's mind at Mount Sinai, when they said to Moses, *Speak thou to us, and we will hear, but let not God speak to us lest we die*, Exod. xx. 19. If Daniel could not bear it, how could we? Now this he insists upon as an excuse for his irreverent silence, which otherwise would have been blame-worthy: *How can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord?* v. 17. Note, Whenever we enter into communion with God it becomes us to have a due sense of the vast distance and disproportion that there are between us and the holy angels, and of the infinite distance, and no proportion at all, between us and the holy God, and to acknowledge that we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. How shall we that are dust and ashes speak to the Lord of glory?

II. The blessed angel that was employed by Christ to converse with him gave him all the encouragement and comfort that could be. It should seem, it was not he whose glory he saw in vision (v. 5, 6) that here touched him, and talked with him; that was Christ, but this seems to have been the angel Gabriel, whom Christ had once before ordered to instruct Daniel, *ch. viii. 16*. That glorious appearance (as that of the God of glory to Abraham, Acts vii. 2) was to give authority and to gain attention to what the angel should say. Christ himself comforted John when he in a like case *fell at his feet as dead* (Rev. i. 17); but here he did it by the angel, whom Daniel saw in a glory much inferior to that of the vision in the verses before; for he was *like the similitude of the sons of men* (v. 16), one like the appearance of a man, v. 18. When he only appeared, as he had done before (*ch. ix. 21*), we do not find that Daniel was put into any disorder by it, as he was by this vision; and therefore he is here employed a third time with Daniel.

1. He lent him his hand to help him, *touched him, and set him upon his hands and knees* (v. 10), else he would still have lain grovelling, *touched his lips* (v. 16), else he would have been still dumb; again he *touched him* (v. 18), and put strength into him, else he would still have been staggering and trembling. Note, The hand of God's power going along with the word of his grace is alone effectual to redress all our grievances, and to rectify whatever is amiss in us. One touch from heaven brings us to our knees, sets us on our feet, opens our lips, and strengthens us; for it is God that works on us, and *works in us, both to will and to do* that which is good.

2. He assured him of the great favour that God had for him: *Thou art a man greatly beloved* (v. 11); and again (v. 19), *O man greatly beloved!* Note, Nothing is more likely, nothing more effectual, to revive the drooping spirits of the saints than to be assured of God's love to them. Those are greatly beloved indeed whom God loves; and it is comfort enough to know it.

3. He silenced his fears, and encouraged his hopes, with good words and comfortable words. He said unto him, *Fear not, Daniel* (v. 12); and again (v. 19), *O man greatly beloved! fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong*. Never did any tender mother quiet her child, when any thing had grieved or frightened it, with more compassion and affection than the angel here quieted Daniel. Those that are beloved of God have no reason to be afraid of any evil; peace is to them; God himself speaks peace to them; and they ought, upon the warrant of that, to speak peace to themselves; and that peace, that *joy of the Lord*, will be their strength. Will God *plead against us with his great power*? will he take the advantage against us of our being overcome by his terror? No, *but he will put strength into us*, Job xxiii. 6. So he did into Daniel here, when, by reason of the lustre of the vision, *no strength* of his own remained in him; and he acknowledges it (v. 19): *When he had spoken to me I was strengthened*. Note, God by his word puts life, and strength, and spirit into his people; for if he says, *Be strong*, power goes along with the word. And, now that Daniel has experienced the efficacy of God's strengthening word and grace, he is ready for any thing: "*Now let my lord speak, and I can hear it, I can bear it, and am ready to do according to it, for thou hast strengthened me.*" Note, To those that (like Daniel here) have no might God *increases strength*, Isa. xl. 29. And we cannot keep up our communion with God but by strength derived from him; but, when he is pleased to put strength into us, we must make a good use of it, and say, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears*. Let God enable us to comply with his will, and then, whatever it is, we will stand complete in it. *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis—Give what thou commandest, and then command what thou wilt*.

4. He assured him that his fastings and prayers had come up for a memorial before God, as the angel told Cornelius (Acts x. 4): *Fear not, Daniel*, v. 12. It is natural to fallen man to be afraid of an extraordinary messenger from heaven, as dreading to hear evil tidings thence; but Daniel need not fear, for he has by his three weeks' humiliation and supplication sent extraordinary messengers to heaven, which he may expect to return with an olive-branch of peace: "*From the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand the word of God, which is to be the rule of thy prayers, and to chasten thyself before thy God, that thou mightest put an edge upon thy prayers, thy words were heard,*" as, before, *at the beginning of thy supplication*, *ch. ix. 23*. Note, As the entrance of God's word is enlightening to the upright, so the entrance of their prayers is pleasing to God, Ps. cxix. 130. From the first day that we begin to look towards God in a way of duty he is ready to meet us in a



way of mercy. Thus ready is God to hear prayer. *I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest.*

5. He informed him that he was sent to him on purpose to bring him a prediction of the future state of the church, as a token of God's accepting his prayers for the church: "*Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? If thou knewest on what errand I come, thou wouldst not be put into such a consternation by it.*" Note, If we rightly understood the meaning of God's dealings with us, and the methods of his providence and grace concerning us, we should be better reconciled to them. "*I have come for thy words (v. 12), to bring thee a gracious answer to thy prayers.*" Thus, when God's praying people call to him, he says, *Here I am* (Isa. lviii. 9); *what would you have with me?* See the power of prayer, what glorious things it has, in its time, fetched from heaven, what strange discoveries! On what errand did this angel come to Daniel? He tells him (v. 14): *I have come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days.* Daniel was a curious inquisitive man, that had all his days been searching into secret things, and it would be a great gratification to him to be let into the knowledge of things to come. Daniel had always been concerned for the church; its interests lay much upon his heart, and it would be a particular satisfaction to him to know what its state should be, and he would know the better what to pray for as long as he lived. He was now lamenting the difficulties which his people met with in the present day; but, that he might not be offended in those, the angel must tell him what greater difficulties are yet before them; and, if they be wearied now that they only *run with the footmen, how will they contend with horses?* Note, It would abate our resentment of present troubles to consider that we know not but much greater are before us, which we are concerned to provide for. Daniel must be made to know what shall befall his people *in the latter days* of the church, after the cessation of prophecy, and when the time drew nigh for the Messiah to appear, *for yet the vision is for many days*; the principal things that this vision was intended to give the church the foresight of would come to pass in the days of Antiochus, nearly 300 years after this. Now that which the angel is entrusted to communicate to Daniel, and which Daniel is encouraged to expect from him, is not any curious speculations, moral prognostications, nor rational prospects of his own, though he is an angel, but what he has *received from the Lord*. It was the revelation of Jesus Christ that the angel gave to St. John to be delivered to the churches, Rev. i. 1. So here (v. 21): *I will show thee what is written in the scriptures of truth*, that is, what is fixed in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. *The decree of God* is a thing

written, it is a *scripture* which remains and cannot be altered. *What I have written I have written*. As there are scriptures for the revealed will of God, the letters-patent, which are published to the world, so there are scriptures for the secret will of God, the close rolls, which are *sealed among his treasures*, the book of his decrees. Both are *scriptures of truth*; nothing shall be added to nor taken from either of them. *The secret things belong not to us*, only now and then some few paragraphs have been copied out from the book of God's counsels, and delivered to the prophets for the use of the church, as here to Daniel; but they are the *things revealed*, even the *words of this law*, which belong to us and to our children; and we are concerned to study what is written in these *scriptures of truth*, for they are things which *belong to our everlasting peace*.

6. He gave him a general account of the adversaries of the church's cause, from whom it might be expected that troubles would arise, and of its patrons, under whose protection it might be assured of safety and victory at last. (1.) *The kings of the earth* are and will be its adversaries; for they set themselves against the Lord, and against his Anointed, Ps. ii. 2. The angel told Daniel that he was to have come to him with a gracious answer to his prayers, but that the *prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood him one and twenty days*, just the three weeks that Daniel had been fasting and praying. Cambyses king of Persia had been very busy to embarrass the affairs of the Jews, and to do them all the mischief he could, and the angel had been all that time employed to counter-work him; so that he had been constrained to defer his visit to Daniel till now, for angels can be but in one place at a time. Or, as Dr. Lightfoot says, This new king of Persia, by hindering the temple, had hindered those good tidings which otherwise he should have brought him. The kings and kingdoms of the world were indeed sometimes helpful to the church, but more often they were injurious to it. "*When I have gone forth from the kings of Persia, when their monarchy is brought down for their unkindness to the Jews, then the prince of Grecia shall come,*" v. 20. The Grecian monarchy, though favourable to the Jews at first, as the Persian was, will yet come to be vexatious to them. Such is the state of the church-militant; when it has got clear of one enemy it has another to encounter: and such a hydra's head is that of the old serpent; when one storm has *blown over* it is not long before another rises. (2.) *The God of heaven* is, and will be, its protector, and, under him, the angels of heaven are its patrons and guardians. [1.] Here is the angel Gabriel busy in the service of the church, making his part good in defence of it twenty-one days, *against the prince of Persia, and remaining there with the kings of Persia*, as consul, or liege-an-

bassador, to take care of the affairs of the Jews in that court, and to do them service, v. 13. And, though much was done against them by the kings of Persia (God permitting it), it is probable that much more mischief would have been done them, and they would have been quite ruined (witness Haman's plot), if God had not prevented it by the ministration of angels. Gabriel resolves, when he has despatched this errand to Daniel, that he will return to *fight with the prince of Persia*, will continue to oppose him, and will at length humble and bring down that proud monarchy (v. 20), though he knows that another as mischievous, even that of Grecia, will rise instead of it. [2.] Here is Michael our prince, the great protector of the church, and the patron of its just but injured cause: *The first of the chief princes*, v. 13. Some understand it of a created angel, but an archangel of the highest order, 1 Thess. iv. 16; Jude 9. Others think that *Michael the archangel* is no other than Christ himself, the *angel of the covenant*, and the Lord of the angels, he whom Daniel saw in vision, v. 5. *He came to help me* (v. 13); and there is *none but he that holds with me in these things*, v. 21. Christ is the church's prince; angels are not, Heb. ii. 5. He presides in the affairs of the church and effectually provides for its good. He is said to *hold with the angels*, for it is he that makes them serviceable to the *heirs of salvation*; and, if he were not on the church's side, its case were bad. But, says David, and so says the church, *The Lord takes my part with those that help me*, Ps. cxviii. 7. *The Lord is with those that uphold my soul*, Ps. liv. 4.

## CHAP. XI.

The angel Gabriel, in this chapter, performs his promise made to Daniel in the foregoing chapter, that he would "show him what should befall his people in the latter days," according to that which was "written in the scriptures of truth;" very particularly does he here foretell the succession of the Kings of Persia and Grecia, and the affairs of their kingdoms, especially the mischief which Antiochus Epiphanes did in his time to the church, which was foretold before, ch. viii. 11—12. Here is, I. A brief prediction of the setting up of the Grecian monarchy upon the ruins of the Persian monarchy, which was now newly begun, ver. 1—4. II. A prediction of the affairs of the two kingdoms of Egypt and Syria, with reference to each other, ver. 5—20. III. Of the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes, and his actions and successes, ver. 21—29. IV. Of the great mischief that he should do to the Jewish nation and religion, and his contempt of all religion, ver. 30—35. V. Of his fall and ruin at last, when he is in the heat of his pursuit, ver. 40—45.

**A**LSO I in the first year of Darius the Mede, *even I*, stood to confirm and to strengthen him. 2 And now will I show thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than *they* all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. 3 And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. 4 And when he shall stand up

his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.

Here, 1. The angel Gabriel lets Daniel know the good service he has done to the Jewish nation (v. 1): "*In the first year of Darius the Mede, who destroyed Babylon and released the Jews out of that house of bondage, I stood a strength and fortress to him, that is, I was instrumental to protect him, and give him success in his wars, and, after he had conquered Babylon, to confirm him in his resolution to release the Jews,*" which, it is likely, met with much opposition. Thus by the angel, and at the request of *the watcher*, the golden head was broken, and the axe laid to the root of the tree. Note, We must acknowledge the hand of God in the strengthening of those that are friends to the church for the service they are to do it, and confirming them in their good resolutions; herein he uses the ministry of angels more than we are aware of. And the many instances we have known of God's care of his church formerly encourage us to depend upon him in further straits and difficulties.

2. He foretels the reign of four Persian kings (v. 2): *Now I will tell thee the truth*, that is, the true meaning of the visions of the great image, and of the four beasts, and expound in plain terms what was before represented by dark types. (1.) There shall stand up *three kings in Persia*, besides Darius, in whose reign this prophecy is dated, ch. ix. 1. Mr. Broughton makes these three to be Cyrus, Artaxata or Artaxerxes, called by the Greeks *Cambyses*, and Ahasuerus that married Esther, called *Darius son of Hystaspes*. To these three the Persians gave these attributes—Cyrus was a father, Cambyses a master, and Darius a hoarder up. So Herodotus. (2.) There shall be a fourth, *far richer than they all*, that is, Xerxes, of whose wealth the Greek authors take notice. By *his strength* (his vast army, consisting of 800,000 men at least) and *his riches*, with which he maintained and paid that vast army, he *stirred up all* against the *realm of Greece*. Xerxes's expedition against Greece is famous in history, and the shameful defeat that he met with. He who when he went out was the terror of Greece in his return was the scorn of Greece. Daniel needed not to be told what disappointment he would meet with, for he was a hinderer of the building of the temple; but soon after, about thirty years after the first return from captivity, Darius, a young king, revived the building of the temple, owning the hand of God against his predecessors for hindering it, Ezra vi. 7. 3. He foretels Alexander's



conquests and the partition of his kingdom, v. 3. He is that *mighty king* that shall *stand up* against the kings of Persia, and he shall *rule with great dominion*, over many kingdoms, and with a despotic power, for he shall *do according to his will*, and undo likewise, which, by the law of the Medes and Persians, their kings could not. When Alexander, after he had conquered Asia, would be worshipped as a god, then this was fulfilled, that he shall *do according to his will*. That is God's prerogative, but was his pretension. But (v. 4) his *kingdom* shall soon be *broken*, and *divided* into four parts, *but not to his posterity*, nor shall any of his successors reign *according to his dominion*; none of them shall have such large territories nor such an absolute power. His *kingdom* was *plucked up for others besides those of his own family*. Arideus, his brother, was made king in Macedonia; Olympias, Alexander's mother, killed him, and poisoned Alexander's two sons, Hercules and Alexander. Thus was his family rooted out by its own hands. See what decaying perishing things worldly pomp and possessions are, and the powers by which they are got. Never was the vanity of the world and its greatest things shown more evidently than in the story of Alexander. *All is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

5 And the king of the south shall be strong, and *one* of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion *shall be a great dominion*. 6 And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in *these* times. 7 But out of a branch of her roots shall *one* stand up in his estate, which shall come with an army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail: 8 And shall also carry captives into Egypt their gods, with their princes, *and* with their precious vessels of silver and of gold; and he shall continue *more* years than the king of the north. 9 So the king of the south shall come into *his* kingdom, and shall return into his own land. 10 But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of

great forces: and *one* shall certainly come, and overflow, and pass through: then shall he return, and be stirred up, *even* to his fortress. 11 And the king of the south shall be moved with choler, and shall come forth and fight with him, *even* with the king of the north: and he shall set forth a great multitude; but the multitude shall be given into his hand. 12 And when he hath taken away the multitude, his heart shall be lifted up; and he shall cast down *many* ten thousands: but he shall not be strengthened *by it*. 13 For the king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come after certain years with a great army and with much riches. 14 And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision; but they shall fall. 15 So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mount, and take the most fenced cities: and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither his chosen people, neither *shall there be any* strength to withstand. 16 But he that cometh against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him: and he shall stand in the glorious land, which by his hand shall be consumed. 17 He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do: and he shall give him the daughter of women, corrupting her: but she shall not stand *on his side*, neither be for him. 18 After this shall he turn his face unto the isles, and shall take many: but a prince for his own behalf shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease; without his own reproach he shall cause *it* to turn upon him. 19 Then he shall turn his face toward the fort of his own land: but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found. 20 Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes *in* the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.

Here are foretold,

I. The rise and power of two great kingdoms out of the remains of Alexander's conquests, v. 5. 1. The kingdom of Egypt, which was made considerable by Ptolemæus Lagus, one of Alexander's captains, whose successors were, from him, called the *Lagidae*. He is called the king of the south, that is, Egypt, named here, v. 8, 42, 43. The countries that at first belonged to Ptolemy are reckoned to be Egypt, Phœnicia, Arabia, Libya, Ethiopia, &c. Theocr. Idyl. 17. 2. The kingdom of Syria, which was set up by Seleucus Nicanor, or the conqueror; he was one of Alexander's princes, and became stronger than the other, and had the greatest dominion of all, was the most powerful of all Alexander's successors. It was said that he had no fewer than seventy-two kingdoms under him. Both these were strong against Judah (the affairs of which are particularly eyed in this prediction); Ptolemy, soon after he gained Egypt, invaded Judea, and took Jerusalem on a sabbath, pretending a friendly visit. Seleucus also gave disturbance to Judea.

II. The fruitless attempt to unite these two kingdoms as iron and clay in Nebuchadnezzar's image (v. 6): "*At the end of certain years, about seventy after Alexander's death, the Lagidæ and the Seleucidæ shall associate, but not in sincerity. Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, shall marry his daughter Berenice to Antiochus Theos, king of Syria,*" who had already a wife called *Ladodice*. "*Berenice shall come to the king of the north, to make an agreement, but it shall not hold: She shall not retain the power of the arm; neither she nor her posterity shall establish themselves in the kingdom of the north, neither shall Ptolemy her father, nor Antiochus her husband (between whom there was to be a great alliance), stand, nor their arm, but she shall be given up and those that brought her,*" all that projected that unhappy marriage between her and Antiochus, which occasioned so much mischief, instead of producing a coalition between the northern and southern crowns, as was hoped. Antiochus divorced Berenice, took his former wife *Ladodice* again, who soon after poisoned him, procured Berenice and her son to be murdered, and set up her own son by Antiochus to be king, who was called *Seleucus Callinicus*.

III. A war between the two kingdoms, v. 7, 8. A branch from the same root with Berenice shall stand up in his estate. Ptolemæus Euergetes, the son and successor of Ptolemæus Philadelphus, shall come with an army against Seleucus Callinicus, king of Syria, to avenge his sister's quarrel, and shall prevail; and he shall carry away a rich booty both of persons and goods into Egypt, and shall continue more years than the king of the north. This Ptolemy reigned forty-six years; and Justin says that if his own affairs

had not called him home he would, in this war, have made himself master of the whole kingdom of Syria. But (v. 9) he shall be forced to come into his kingdom and return into his own land, to keep peace there, so that he can no longer carry on the war abroad. Note, It is very common for a treacherous peace to end in a bloody war.

IV. The long and busy reign of *Antiochus the Great*, king of Syria. Seleucus Callinicus, that king of the north that was overcome (v. 7) and died miserably, left two sons, Seleucus and Antiochus; these are his sons, the sons of the king of the north, that shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces, to recover what their father had lost, v. 10. But Seleucus the elder, being weak, and unable to rule his army, was poisoned by his friends, and reigned only two years; and his brother Antiochus succeeded him, who reigned thirty-seven years, and was called the *Great*. And therefore the angel, though he speaks of sons at first, goes on with the account of one only, who was but fifteen years old when he began to reign, and he shall certainly come, and overflow, and over-run, and shall be restored at length to what his father lost. 1. The king of the south, in this war, shall at first have very great success. Ptolemæus Philopater, moved with indignation at the indignities done by *Antiochus the Great*, shall (though otherwise a slothful prince) come forth, and fight with him, and shall bring a vast army into the field of 70,000 foot, and 5000 horse, and seventy-three elephants. And the other multitude (the army of Antiochus, consisting of 62,000 foot, and 6000 horse, and 102 elephants) shall be given into his hand. Polybius, who lived with Scipio, has given a particular account of this battle of Raphia. Ptolemæus Philopater, having gained this victory, grew very insolent; his heart was lifted up; then he went into the temple of God at Jerusalem, and, in defiance of the law, entered the most holy place, for which God has a controversy with him, so that, though he shall cast down many myriads, yet he shall not be strengthened by it, so as to secure his interest. For, 2. The king of the north, *Antiochus the Great*, shall return with a greater army than the former; and, at the end of times (that is, years) he shall come with a mighty army, and great riches, against the king of the south, that is, Ptolemæus Epiphanes, who succeeded Ptolemæus Philopater his father, when he was a child, which gave advantage to Antiochus the Great. In this expedition he had some powerful allies (v. 14): *Many shall stand up against the king of the south.* Philip of Macedon was confederate with Antiochus against the king of Egypt, and Scopas his general, whom he sent into Syria; Antiochus routed him, destroyed a great part of his army; whereupon the Jews willingly yielded to Antiochus, joined with him, helped him to



besiege Ptolemæus's garrisons. Then *the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision*, to help forward the accomplishment of this prophecy; but *they shall fall, and shall come to nothing*, v. 14. Hereupon (v. 15) the king of the north, this same Antiochus Magnus, shall carry on his design against the king of the south another way. (1.) He shall surprise his strong-holds; all that he has got in Syria and Samaria, and the arms of the south, all the power of the king of Egypt, shall not be able to withstand him. See how dubious and variable the turns of the scale of war are; like buying and selling, it is winning and losing; sometimes one side gets the better and sometimes the other; yet neither by chance; it is not, as they call it, the *fortune of war*, but according to the will and counsel of God, who brings some low and raises others up. (2.) He shall make himself master of the land of Judea (v. 16): *He that comes against him* (that is, the king of the north) shall carry all before him and do what he pleases, and *he shall stand and get footing in the glorious land*; so the land of Israel was, and by his hand it was wasted and consumed, for with the spoil of that good land he victualled his vast army. The land of Judea lay between these two potent kingdoms of Egypt and Syria, so that in all the struggles between them that was sure to suffer, for to it they both bore *ill will*. Yet some read this, *By his hand it shall be perfected*; as if it intimated that the land of Judea, being taken under the protection of this Antiochus, shall flourish, and be in better condition than it had been. (3.) He shall still push on his war against the king of Egypt, and *set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom*, taking advantage of the infancy of Ptolemy Epiphanes, and the *upright ones*, many of the pious Israelites, siding with him, v. 17. In prosecution of his design, he shall give him his daughter Cleopatra to wife, designing, as Saul in giving his daughter to David, that she should be a *snare to him*, and do him a mischief; but she shall not stand on her father's side, nor be for him, but for her husband, and so that plot failed him. (4.) His war with the Romans is here foretold (v. 18): *He shall turn his face to the isles* (v. 18), the isles of the Gentiles (Gen. x. 5), Greece and Italy. He took many of the isles about the Hellespont—Rhodes, Samos, Delos, &c., which by war or treaty he made himself master of; but a prince, or state (so some), even the Roman senate, or a leader, even the Roman general, shall return his reproach with which he abused the Romans upon himself, or shall make his shame rest on himself, and without his own shame, or any disgrace to himself, shall pay him again. This was fulfilled when the two Scipios were sent with an army against Antiochus. Hannibal was then with him, and advised him to invade Italy and waste it as

he had done; but he did not take his advice; and Scipio joined battle with him, and gave him a total defeat, though Antiochus had 70,000 men and the Romans but 30,000. Thus he caused the reproach offered by him to cease. (5.) His fall. When he was totally routed by the Romans, and was forced to abandon to them all he had in Europe, and had a very heavy tribute exacted from him, he turned to his own land, and, not knowing which way to raise money to pay his tribute, he plundered a temple of Jupiter, which so incensed his own subjects against him that they set upon him, and killed him; so he was overthrown, and fell, and was no more found, v. 19. (6.) His next successor, v. 20. There rose up one in his place, a raiser of taxes, a sender forth of the extortioner, or extorter. This character was remarkably answered in Seleucus Philopater, the elder son of Antiochus the Great, who was a great oppressor of his own subjects, and exacted abundance of money from them; and, when he was told he would thereby lose his friends, he said he knew no better friend he had than money. He likewise attempted to rob the temple at Jerusalem, which this seems especially to refer to. But *within a few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger nor in battle*, but poisoned by Heliodorus, one of his own servants, when he had reigned but twelve years, and done nothing remarkable.

V. From all this let us learn, 1. That God in his providence sets up one, and pulls down another, as he pleases, advances some from low beginnings and depresses others that were very high. Some have called great men the *foot-balls of fortune*; or, rather, they are the *tools of Providence*. 2. This world is full of wars and fightings, which come from men's lusts, and make it a theatre of sin and misery. 3. All the changes and revolutions of states and kingdoms, and every event, even the most minute and contingent, were plainly and perfectly foreseen by the God of heaven, and to him nothing is new. 4. No word of God shall fall to the ground; but what he has designed, what he has declared, shall infallibly come to pass; and even the sins of men shall be made to serve his purpose, and contribute to the bringing of his counsels to birth in their season; and yet God is not the author of sin. 5. That, for the right understanding of some parts of scripture, it is necessary that heathen authors be consulted, which give light to the scripture, and show the accomplishment of what is there foretold; we have therefore reason to bless God for the human learning with which many have done great service to divine truths.

21 And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. 22

And with the arms of a flood shall they be overflowed from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant. 23 And after the league *made* with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people. 24 He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do *that* which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: *yea*, and he shall forecast his devices against the strong holds, even for a time. 25 And he shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand: for they shall forecast devices against him. 26 Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow: and many shall fall down slain. 27 And both these kings' hearts *shall be* to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end *shall be* at the time appointed. 28 Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart *shall be* against the holy covenant; and he shall do *exploits*, and return to his own land. 29 At the time appointed he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter. 30 For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant. 31 And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily *sacrifice*, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate. 32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do *exploits*. 33 And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, *many* days. 34 Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. 35 And *some* of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make *them* white, *even* to the time of the end: because *it is* yet for a time appointed. 36 And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. 37 Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all. 38 But in his estate shall he honour the God of forces: and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. 39 Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god, whom he shall acknowledge *and* increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain. 40 And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over. 41 He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many *countries* shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, *even* Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon. 42 He shall stretch forth his hand also upon the countries: and the land of Egypt shall not escape. 43 But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt: and the Libyans and the Ethiopians *shall be* at his steps. 44 But tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him: therefore he shall go forth with great fury



to destroy, and utterly to make away many. 45 And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palaces between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

All this is a prophecy of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the *little horn* spoken of before (*ch. viii. 9*) a sworn enemy to the Jewish religion, and a bitter persecutor of those that adhered to it. What troubles the Jews met with in the reigns of the Persian kings were not so particularly foretold to Daniel as these, because then they had living prophets with them, Haggai and Zechariah, to encourage them; but these troubles in the days of Antiochus were foretold, because, before that time, prophecy would cease, and they would find it necessary to have recourse to the written word. Some things in this prediction concerning Antiochus are alluded to in the New-Testament predictions of the antichrist, especially *v. 36, 37*. And as it is usual with the prophets, when they foretel the prosperity of the Jewish church, to make use of such expressions as were applicable to the *kingdom of Christ*, and insensibly to slide into a prophecy of that, so, when they foretel the troubles of the church, they make use of such expressions as have a further reference to the kingdom of the antichrist, the rise and ruin of that. Now concerning Antiochus, the angel foretels here,

I. His character: He shall be a *vile person*. He called himself *Epiphanes—the illustrious*, but his character was the reverse of his surname. The heathen writers describe him to be an *odd-humoured* man, rude and boisterous, base and sordid. He would sometimes steal out of the court into the city, and herd with any infamous company *incognito—in disguise*; he made himself a companion of the common sort, and of the basest strangers that came to town. He had the most unaccountable whims, so that some took him to be silly, others to be mad. Hence he was called *Epimanes—the madman*. He is called a *vile person*, for he had been a long time a hostage at Rome for the fidelity of his father when the Romans had subdued him; and it was agreed that, when the other hostages were exchanged, he should continue a prisoner at large.

II. His accession to the crown. By a trick he got his elder brother's son, Demetrius, to be sent a hostage to Rome, in exchange for him, contrary to the cartel; and, his elder brother being made away with by Heliodorus (*v. 20*), he took the kingdom. The states of Syria did not *give it to him* (*v. 21*), because they knew it belonged to his elder brother's son, nor did he get it by the sword, but *came in peaceably*, pretending to reign for his brother's son, Demetrius, then a hostage at Rome. But with the help of

Eumenes and Attalus, neighbouring princes, he gained an interest in the people, and by *flatteries obtained the kingdom*, established himself in it, and crushed Heliodorus, who made head against him *with the arms of a flood*; those that opposed him were *overflown and broken before him*, even the *prince of the covenant*, his nephew, the rightful heir, whom he pretended to covenant with that he would resign to him whenever he should return, *v. 22*. But (*v. 23*) *after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully*, as one whose avowed maxim it is that princes ought not to be bound by their word any longer than it is for their interest. And *with a small people*, that at first cleave to him, he shall *become strong*, and (*v. 24*) *he shall enter peaceably upon the fattest places of the kingdom of Syria*, and, very unlike his predecessors, shall *scatter among the people the prey, and the spoil, and riches*, to insinuate himself into their affections; but, at the same time, he shall *forecast his devices against the strong-holds*, to make himself master of them, so that his generosity shall last but for a time; when he has got the garrisons into his hands he will scatter his spoil no more, but rule by force, as those commonly do that come in by fraud. He that comes in like a fox reigns like a lion. Some understand these verses of his first expedition into Egypt, when he came not as an enemy, but as a friend and guardian to the young king Ptolemæus Philometer, and therefore brought with him but few followers; yet those stout men, and faithful to his interest, whom he placed in divers of the strong-holds in Egypt, thereby making himself master of them.

III. His war with Egypt, which was his second expedition thither. This is described, *v. 25, 27*. Antiochus shall *stir up his power and courage* against Ptolemæus Philometer king of Egypt. Ptolemy, thereupon, shall *be stirred up to battle* against him, shall come against him *with a very great and mighty army*; but Ptolemy, though he has such a vast army, shall not be able to stand before him; for Antiochus's army shall *overthrow* his, and overpower it, and great multitudes of the Egyptian army shall *fall down slain*. And no marvel, for the king of Egypt shall be betrayed by his own counsellors; those that *feed of the portion of his meat*, that eat of his bread and live upon him, being bribed by Antiochus, shall *forecast devices against him*, and even *they shall destroy him*; and what fence is there against such treachery? After the battle, a treaty of peace shall be set on foot, and these two kings shall meet *at one council-board*, to adjust the articles of peace between them; but they shall neither of them be sincere in it, for they shall, in their pretences and promises of amity and friendship, *lie to one another*, for their hearts shall be at the same time to do one another all the mischief they can. And then no marvel that *it shall not prosper*. The peace



shall not last; but *the end of it shall be at the time appointed in the divine Providence, and then the war shall break out again, as a sore that is only skinned over.*

IV. Another expedition against Egypt. From the former he *returned with great riches* (v. 28), and therefore took the first occasion to invade Egypt again, *at the time appointed by the divine Providence, two years after, in the eighth year of his reign, v. 29. He shall come towards the south.* But this attempt shall not succeed, as the two former did, nor shall he gain his point, as he had done before once and again; for (v. 30) *the ships of Chittim shall come against him, that is, the navy of the Romans, or only ambassadors from the Roman senate, who came in ships. Ptolemæus Philometer, king of Egypt, being now in a strict alliance with the Romans, craved their aid against Antiochus, who had besieged him and his mother Cleopatra in the city of Alexandria. The Roman senate thereupon sent an embassy to Antiochus, to command him to raise the siege, and, when he desired some time to consider of it and consult with his friends about it, Popilius, one of the ambassadors, with his staff drew a circle about him, and told him, as one having authority, he should give a positive answer before he came out of that circle; whereupon, fearing the Roman power, he was forced immediately to give orders for the raising of the siege and the retreat of his army out of Egypt. So Livy and others relate the story which this prophecy refers to. He shall be grieved, and return; for it was a great vexation to him to be forced to yield thus.*

V. His rage and cruel practices against the Jews. This is that part of his government, or mis-government rather, which is most enlarged upon in this prediction. In his return from his expedition into Egypt (which is prophesied of, v. 28) *he did exploits against the Jews, in the sixth year of his reign; then he spoiled the city and temple. But the most terrible storm was in his return from Egypt, two years after, prophesied of v. 30. Then he took Judea in his way home; and, because he could not gain his point in Egypt by reason of the Romans interposing, he wreaked his revenge upon the poor Jews, who gave him no provocation, but had greatly provoked God to permit him to do it, Dan. viii. 23.*

1. He had a rooted antipathy to the Jews' religion: *His heart was against the holy covenant, v. 28. And (v. 30) he had indignation against the holy covenant, that covenant of peculiarity by which the Jews were incorporated a people distinct from all other nations, and dignified above them. He hated the law of Moses and the worship of the true God, and was vexed at the privileges of the Jewish nation and the promises made to them. Note, That which is the hope and joy of the people of God is the*

envy of their neighbours, and that is *the holy covenant.* Esau hated Jacob because he had got the blessing. Those that are strangers to the covenant are often enemies to it.

2. He carried on his malicious designs against the Jews by the assistance of some perfidious apostate Jews. He kept up *intelligence with those that forsook the holy covenant* (v. 30), some of the Jews that were false to their religion, and introduced the customs of the heathen, with whom they made a covenant. See the fulfilling of this, 1 Mac. i. 11—15, where it is expressly said, concerning those renegade Jews, that they *made themselves uncircumcised and forsook the holy covenant.* We read (2 Mac. iv. 9) of Jason, the brother of Onias the high priest, who by the appointment of Antiochus set up a school at Jerusalem, *for the training up of youth in the fashions of the heathen;* and (2 Mac. iv. 23, &c.) of Menelaus, who fell in with the interests of Antiochus, and was the man that helped him into Jerusalem, now in his last return from Egypt. We read much in the book of the Maccabees of the mischief done to the Jews by these treacherous men of their own nation, Jason and Menelaus, and their party. These upon all occasions he made use of. "*Such as do wickedly against the covenant, such as throw up their religion, and comply with the heathen, he shall corrupt with flatteries, to harden them in their apostasy, and to make use of them as decoys to draw in others,*" v. 32. Note, It is not strange if those who do not live up to their religion, but in their conversations *do wickedly against the covenant, are easily corrupted by flatteries to quit their religion.* Those that make shipwreck of a good conscience will soon make shipwreck of the faith.

3. He profaned the temple. *Arms stand on his part* (v. 31), not only his own army which he now brought from Egypt, but a great party of deserters from the Jewish religion that joined with them; and they *polluted the sanctuary of strength, not only the holy city, but the temple.* The story of this we have, 1 Mac. i. 21, &c. He *entered proudly into the sanctuary, took away the golden altar, and the candlestick, &c. And therefore (v. 25) there was a great mourning in Israel; the princes and elders mourned, &c. And (2 Mac. v. 15, &c.) Antiochus went into the most holy temple, Menelaus, that traitor to the laws and to his own country, being his guide.* Antiochus, having resolved to bring *about him to be of his religion, took away the daily sacrifice, v. 31.* Some observe that the word *Tannidh*, which signifies no more than *daily*, is only here, and in the parallel place, used for the *daily sacrifice*, as if there were a designed liberty left to supply it either with *sacrifice*, which was suppressed by Antiochus, or with *gospel-worship*, which was suppressed by the Antichrist. Then he *set up the abomi-*



nation of desolation upon the altar (1 Mac. i. 54), even an idol altar (v. 59), and called the temple the temple of *Jupiter Olympius*, 2 Mac. vi. 2.

4. He persecuted those who retained their integrity. Though there are many who *for-sake the covenant and do wickedly* against it, yet there is a people who do *know their God* and retain the knowledge of him, and *they shall be strong and do exploits*, v. 32. When others yield to the tyrant's demands, and surrender their consciences to his impositions, they bravely keep their ground, resist the temptation, and make the tyrant himself ashamed of his attempt upon them. Good old Eleazar, one of the *principal scribes*, when he had swine's flesh thrust into his mouth, did bravely spit it out again, though he knew he must be tormented to death for so doing, and was so, 2 Mac. vi. 19. The mother and her seven sons were put to death for adhering to their religion, 2 Mac. vii. This might well be called *doing exploits*; for to choose suffering rather than sin is a great exploit. And it was *by faith*, by being *strong in faith*, that they did those exploits, that *they were tortured, not accepting deliverance*, as the apostle speaks, probably with reference to that story, Heb. xi. 35. Or it may refer to the military courage and achievements of Judas Maccabæus and others in opposition to Antiochus. Note, The right knowledge of God is, and will be, the strength of the soul, and, in the strength of that, gracious souls do exploits. *Those that know his name will put their trust in him*, and by that trust will do great things. Now, concerning this people that knew their God, we are here told, (1.) *That they shall instruct many*, v. 33. They shall make it their business to show others what they have learned themselves of the difference between truth and falsehood, good and evil. Note, Those that have the knowledge of God themselves should communicate their knowledge to those about them, and this spiritual charity must be extensive: they must *instruct many*. Some understand this of a society newly erected for the propagating of divine knowledge, called *Assideans*, godly men, *pietists* (so the name signifies), that were both knowing and zealous in the law; these instructed many. Note, In times of persecution and apostasy, which are trying times, those that have knowledge ought to make use of it for the strengthening and establishing of others. Those that understand aright themselves ought to do what they can to bring others to understand; for knowledge is a talent that must be traded with. Or, They shall instruct many by their perseverance in their duty and their patient suffering for it. Good examples instruct many, and with many are the most powerful instructions. (2.) *They shall fall* by the cruelty of Antiochus, shall be put to the torture, and put to death, by his rage. Though they are so excellent and

intelligent themselves, and so useful and serviceable to others, yet Antiochus shall show them no mercy, but *they shall fall for some days*; so it may be read, Rev. ii. 10, *Thou shalt have tribulation ten days*. We read much, in the books of the Maccabees, of Antiochus's barbarous usage of the pious Jews, how many he slew in wars and how many he murdered in cold blood. Women were *put to death* for having their children *circumcised*, and their *infants were hanged about their necks*, 1 Mac. i. 60, 61. But why did God suffer this? How can this be reconciled with the justice and goodness of God? I answer, Very well, if we consider what it was that God aimed at in this (v. 35): *Some of those of understanding shall fall*, but it shall be for the good of the church and for their own spiritual benefit. *It shall be to try them, and to purge, and to make them white*. They needed these afflictions themselves. The best have their spots, which must be washed off, their dross, which must be purged out; and their troubles, particularly their *share in the public troubles*, help to do this; being sanctified to them by the grace of God, they are means of mortifying their corruptions, weaning them from the world, and awakening them to greater seriousness and diligence in religion. They try them, as silver in the furnace is refined from its dross; they purge them, as wheat in the barn is winnowed from the chaff; and they *make them white*, as cloth by the fuller is cleared from its spots. See 1 Pet. i. 7. Their sufferings for *righteousness' sake* would try and purge the nation of the Jews, would convince them of the truth, excellency, and power of that holy religion which these *understanding men* died for their adherence to. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church; it is precious blood, and not a drop of it should be shed but upon such a valuable consideration. (3.) The cause of religion, though it be thus run upon, shall not be run down. *When they shall fall* they shall not be utterly cast down, but *they shall be holpen with a little help*, v. 34. Judas Maccabæus, and his brethren, and a few with them, shall *make head* against the tyrant, and assert the injured cause of their religion; they *pulled down the idolatrous altars, circumcised the children that they found uncircumcised, recovered the law out of the hand of the Gentiles, and the work prospered in their hands*, 1 Mac. ii. 45, &c. Note, Those that stand by the cause of religion when it is threatened and struck at, though they may not immediately be delivered and made victorious, shall yet have *present help*. And a *little help* must not be despised; but, when times are very bad, we must be thankful for *some reviving*. It is likewise foretold that *many shall cleave to them with flatteries*; when they see the Maccabees prosper some Jews shall join with them that are no true friends to religion, but will only pretend friendship either with de-

sign to *betray them* or in hope to *rise with them*; but the *fiery trial* (v. 35) will separate between the *precious and the vile*, and by it *those that are perfect will be made manifest* and those that are not. (4.) Though these troubles may continue long, yet they will have an *end*. They are *for a time appointed*, a limited time, fixed in the divine counsels. This warfare shall be accomplished. *Hitherto* the power of the enemy shall come, and *no further*; here shall its *proud waves be stayed*.

5. He grew very proud, insolent, and profane, and, being puffed up with his conquests, bade defiance to Heaven, and trampled upon every thing that was sacred, v. 36. &c. And here some think begins a prophecy of the antichrist, the papal kingdom. It is plain that St. Paul, in his prophecy of the rise and reign of the man of sin, alludes to this (2 Thess. ii. 4), which shows that Antiochus was a type and figure of that enemy, as Babylon also was; but, this being joined in a continued discourse with the foregoing prophecies concerning Antiochus, to me it seems probable that it principally refers to him, and in him had its primary accomplishment, and has reference to the other only by way of accommodation. (1.) He shall impiously dishonour the God of Israel, the only living and true God, called here the *God of gods*. He shall, in defiance of him and his authority, *do according to his will* against his people and his holy religion; he shall *exalt himself* above him, as Sennacherib did, and shall *speak marvellous things against him* and against his laws and institutions. This was fulfilled when Antiochus forbade *sacrifices* to be offered in God's temple, and ordered the *sabbaths* to be profaned, the *sanctuary* and the *holy people* to be *polluted*, &c., *to the end that they might forget the law and change all the ordinances*, and this upon pain of death, 1 Mac. i. 45. (2.) He shall proudly put contempt upon *all other gods*, shall *magnify himself above every god*, even the gods of the nations. Antiochus wrote to his own kingdom that every one should leave the gods he had worshipped, and worship such as he ordered, contrary to the practice of all the conquerors that went before him, 1 Mac. i. 41, 42. *And all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king*; fond as they were of their gods, they did not think them worth suffering for, but, their gods being idols, it was all alike to them what gods they worshipped. Antiochus did not *regard any god*, but *magnified himself above all*, v. 37. He was so proud that he thought himself above the condition of a mortal man, that he could *command the waves of the sea*, and *reach to the stars of heaven*, as his insolence and haughtiness are expressed, 2 Mac. ix. 8, 10. Thus he carried all before him, *till the indignation was accomplished* (v. 36), till he had run his length, and filled up the measure of his

iniquity; for *that which is determined shall be done*, and nothing more, nothing short. (3.) He shall, contrary to the way of the heathen, disregard the god of his fathers, v. 37. Though an affection to the religion of their ancestors was, among the heathen, almost as natural to them as *the desire of women* (for, if you search through *the isles of Chittim*, you will not find an instance of a nation that has *changed its gods*, Jer. ii. 10, 11), yet Antiochus shall not *regard the god of his fathers*; he made laws to abolish the religion of his country, and to bring in the idols of the Greeks. And though his predecessors had honoured the God of Israel, and given great gifts to the temple at Jerusalem (2 Mac. iii. 2, 3), he offered the greatest indignities to God and his temple. His not regarding the *desire of women* may denote his barbarous cruelty (he shall spare no age or sex, no, not the tender ones) or his unnatural lusts, or, in general, his contempt of every thing which men of honour have a concern for, or it might be accomplished in something we meet not with in history. Its being joined to his not *regarding the god of his fathers* intimates that the idolatries of his country had in them more of the gratifications of the flesh than those of other countries (Lucian has written of the Syrian goddesses), and yet that would not prevail to keep him to them. (4.) He shall set up an unknown god, a new god, v. 38. *In his estate*, in the room of the god of his fathers (Apollo and Diana, deities of pleasure), he shall *honour the god of forces*, a supposed deity of power, a *god whom his fathers knew not*, nor worshipped; because he will be thought in wisdom and strength to excel his fathers, he shall *honour this god with gold, and silver, and precious stones*, thinking nothing too good for the god he has taken a fancy to. This seems to be Jupiter Olympius, known among the Phœnicians by the name of *Baal-Semen*, the *lord of heaven*, but never introduced among the Syrians till Antiochus introduced it. Thus shall he do *in the most strong holds*, in the temple of Jerusalem, which is called *the sanctuary of strength* (v. 31), and here the *fortresses of munitions*; there he shall set up the image of this *strange god*. Some read it, *He shall commit the munitions of strength*, or of the most strong God (that is, the city Jerusalem), *to a strange god*; he put it under the protection and government of Jupiter Olympius. This god he shall not only acknowledge, but shall *increase with glory*, by setting his image even upon God's altar. And he shall *cause those* that minister to this idol *to rule over many*, shall put them into places of power and trust, and they shall *divide the land for gain*, shall be maintained richly out of the profits of the country. Some by the *Mahuzzim*, or *god of forces*, that Antiochus shall worship, understand *money*, which is said to *answer all*



things, and which is the great idol of worldly people.

Now here is very much that is applicable to the man of sin; he exalts himself above all that is called god or that is worshipped; magnifies himself above all; his flatterers call him our lord god the pope. By forbidding marriage, and magnifying the single life, he pretends not to regard the desire of women; and honours the god of forces, the god Mahuzzim, or strong holds, saints and angels, whom his followers take for their protectors, as the heathen did of old their demons; these they make presidents of several countries, &c. These they honour with vast treasures dedicated to them, and therein the learned Mr. Mede thinks that this prophecy was fulfilled, and that it is referred to 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

VI. Here seems to be another expedition into Egypt, or, at least, a struggle with Egypt. The Romans had tied him up from invading Ptolemy, but now that king of the south pushes at him (v. 40), makes an attempt upon some of his territories, whereupon Antiochus, the king of the north, comes against him like a whirlwind, with incredible swiftness and fury, with chariots, and horses, and many ships, a great force. He shall come through countries, and shall overflow and pass over. In this flying march many countries shall be overthrown by him; and he shall enter into the glorious land, the land of Israel; it is the same word that is translated the pleasant land, ch. viii. 9. He shall make dreadful work among the nations thereabout; yet some shall escape his fury, particularly Edom and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon, v. 41. He did not put these countries under contribution, because they had joined with him against the Jews. But especially the land of Egypt shall not escape, but he will quite beggar that, so bare will he strip it. This some reckon his fourth and last expedition against Egypt, in the tenth or eleventh year of his reign, under pretence of assisting the younger brother of Ptolemæus Philometer against him. We read not of any great slaughter made in this expedition, but great plunder; for, it should seem, that was what he came for: He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, v. 43. Polybius, in Athenæus, relates that Antiochus, having got together abundance of wealth, by spoiling young Philometer, and breaking league with him, and by the contributions of his friends, bestowed a vast deal upon a triumph, in imitation of Paulus Æmilius, and describes the extravagance of it; here we are told how he got that money which he spent so profusely. Notice is here taken likewise of the use he made of the Lybians and Ethiopians, who bordered upon Egypt; they were at his steps; he had them at his foot, had them at his beck, and they made inroads upon Egypt to serve him.

VII. Here is a prediction of the fall and ruin of Antiochus, as before (ch. viii. 25), when he is in the height of his honour, flushed with victory, and laden with spoils, tidings out of the east and out of the north (out of the north-east) shall trouble him, v. 44. Or, He shall have intelligence, both from the eastern and northern parts, that the king of Parthia is invading his kingdom. This obliged him to drop the enterprises he had in hand, and to go against the Persians and Parthians that were revolting from him; and this vexed him, for now he thought utterly to ruin and extirpate the Jewish nation, when that expedition called him off, in which he perished. This is explained by a passage in Tacitus (though an impious one) where he commends Antiochus for his attempt to take away the superstition of the Jews, and bring in the manners of the Greeks, among them (ut terribilam gentem in melius mutaret—to meliorate an odious nation), and laments that he was hindered from accomplishing it by the Parthian war. Now here is, 1. The last effort of his rage against the Jews. When he finds himself perplexed and embarrassed in his affairs he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and utterly to make away many, v. 44. The story of this we have 1 Mac. iii. 27, &c., what a rage Antiochus was in when he heard of the successes of Judas Maccabæus, and the orders he gave to Lysias to destroy Jerusalem. Then he planted the tabernacles of his palace, or tents of his court, between the seas, between the Great Sea and the Dead Sea. He set up his royal pavilion at Emmaus near Jerusalem, in token that, though he could not be present himself, yet he gave full power to his captains to prosecute the war against the Jews with the utmost rigour. He placed his tent there, as if he had taken possession of the glorious holy mountain and called it his own. Note, When impiety grows very impudent we may see its ruin near. 2. His exit: He shall come to his end and none shall help him; God shall cut him off in the midst of his days and none shall be able to prevent his fall. This is the same with that which was foretold ch. viii. 25 (He shall be broken without hand), where we took a view of his miserable end. Note, When God's time shall come to bring proud oppressors to their end none shall be able to help them, nor perhaps inclined to help them; for those that covet to be feared by all when they are in their grandeur, when they come to be in distress will find themselves loved by none; none will lend them so much as a hand or a prayer to help them; and, if the Lord do not help, who shall?

Of the kings that came after Antiochus nothing is here prophesied, for that was the most malicious mischievous enemy to the church, that was a type of the son of perdition, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with



the brightness of his coming, and none shall help him.

CHAP. XII.

After the prediction of the troubles of the Jews under Antiochus, prefiguring the troubles of the Christian church under the anti-christian power, we have here, I. Comforts, and very precious ones, prescribed as aids for the support of God's people in those times of trouble; and they are such as may indifferently serve both for those former times of trouble under Antiochus and those latter which were prefigured by them, ver. 1-4. II. A conference between Christ and an angel concerning the time of the continuance of these events, designed for Daniel's satisfaction, ver. 5-7. III. Daniel's enquiry for his own satisfaction, ver. 8. And the answer he received to that enquiry, ver. 9-13.

AND at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. 4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *even* to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

It is usual with the prophets, when they foretel the grievances of the church, to furnish it at the same time with proper antidotes, a remedy for every malady. And no relief is so sovereign, of such general application, so easily accommodated to every case, and of such powerful efficacy, as those that are fetched from Christ and the future state; thence the comforts here are fetched.

I. Jesus Christ shall appear his church's patron and protector: *At that time*, when the persecution is at the hottest, *Michael shall stand up*, v. 1. The angel had told Daniel what a firm friend Michael was to the church, ch. x. 21. He all along showed this friendship in the upper world; the angels knew it; but now *Michael shall stand up* in his providence, and work deliverance for the Jews, *when he sees that their power is gone*, Deut. xxxii. 36. Christ is *that great prince*, for he is the *prince of the kings of the earth*, Rev. i. 5. And, if he stand up for his church, who can be against it? But this is not all: *At that time* (that is, soon after) Michael shall stand up for the working out of our eternal salvation; the Son of God shall be incarnate, shall be *manifested to destroy the works of the devil*. Christ stood for the children of our people when he was made sin and a curse for them, stood in their stead as a

sacrifice, bore the curse for them, to bear it from them. He stands for them in the intercession he ever lives to make within the veil, stands up for them, and stands their friend. And after the destruction of anti-christ, of whom Antiochus was a type, Christ shall *stand at the latter day upon the earth*, shall appear for the complete redemption of all his.

II. When Christ appears he will recompense tribulation to those that trouble his people. There shall be *a time of trouble*, threatening to all, but ruining to all the implacable enemies of God's kingdom among men, such *trouble as never was since there was a nation*. This is applicable, 1. To the destruction of Jerusalem, which Christ calls (perhaps with an eye to this prediction) *such a great tribulation as was not since the beginning of the world to this time*, Matt. xxiv. 21. This the angel had spoken much of (ch. ix. 26, 27); and it happened about the same time that Christ set up the gospel-kingdom in the world, that Michael our prince *stands up*. Or, 2. To the judgment of the great day, that day that shall *burn as an oven*, and consume the proud and all that do wickedly; that will be such a *day of trouble* as never was to all those whom Michael our prince stands against.

III. He will work salvation for his people: "*At that time thy people shall be delivered*, delivered from the mischief and ruin designed them by Antiochus, even all those that were marked for preservation, that were *written among the living*," Isa. iv. 3. When Christ comes into the world he will save his spiritual Israel from sin and hell, and will, at his second coming, complete their salvation, even the salvation of as many as were given him, as many as have *their names in the book of life*, Rev. xx. 15. They were written there before the world, and will be *found written* there at the end of the world, when the books shall be opened.

IV. There shall be a distinguishing resurrection of those that *sleep in the dust*, v. 2. 1. When God works deliverance for his people from persecution it is a kind of resurrection; so the Jews' release out of Babylon was represented in vision (Ezek. xxxvii) and so the deliverance of the Jews from Antiochus, and other restorations of the church to outward prosperity; they were as *life from the dead*. Many of those who had long slept in the dust of obscurity and calamity shall then awake, some to that life, and honour, and comfort which will be lasting, everlasting; but to others, who, when they return to their prosperity, will return to their iniquity it will be a resurrection to shame and contempt, for the *prosperity of fools* will but expose them and destroy them. 2. When, upon the appearing of Michael our prince, his gospel is preached, many of those who *sleep in the dust*, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be awakened by it to take upon them a profes-



sion of religion, and shall rise out of their heathenism or Judaism; but since there will be always a mixture of hypocrites with true saints, it is but some of those who are *raised to life* to whom the gospel is a *savour of life unto life*, but others will be raised by it to *shame and contempt*, to whom the gospel of Christ will be a *savour of death unto death*, and Christ himself set for their fall. The net of the gospel encloses both good and bad. But, 3. It must be meant of the general resurrection at the last day: *The multitude of those that sleep in the dust shall awake*, that is, all, which shall be a great many. Or, *Of those that sleep in the dust many shall arise to life and many to shame*. The Jews themselves understand this of the resurrection of the dead at the end of time; and Christ seems to have an eye to it when he speaks of the *resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation* (John v. 29); and upon this the Jews are said by St. Paul to expect a *resurrection of the dead both of the just and of the unjust*, Acts xxiv. 15. And nothing could come in more seasonably here, for, under Antiochus's persecution, some basely betrayed their religion, others bravely adhered to it. Now it would be a trouble to them that, when the storm was over, they could neither reward the one nor punish the other; this therefore would be a satisfaction to them, that they would both be recompensed according to their works in the resurrection. And the apostle, speaking of the pious Jews that suffered martyrdom under Antiochus, tells us that though they were tortured yet they *accepted not deliverance*, because they *hoped to obtain this better resurrection*, Heb. xi. 35.

V. There shall be a glorious reward conferred on those who, in the day of trouble and distress, being themselves *wise*, did *instruct many*. Such were taken particular notice of in the prophecy of the persecution (*ch. xi. 33*), that they should do eminent service, and yet should *fall by the sword and by flame*; now, if there were not another life after this, they would be *of all men most miserable*, and therefore we are here assured that they shall be recompensed *in the resurrection of the just* (v. 3): *Those that are wise* (that are teachers, so some read it, for teachers have need of wisdom, and those that have wisdom themselves should communicate it to others) *shall shine as the brightness of the firmament*, shall shine in glory, heavenly glory, the glory of the upper world; and those that by the wisdom they have, and the instructions they give, are instrumental to turn any, especially to turn many to righteousness, shall shine *as the stars for ever and ever*. Note, 1. There is a glory reserved for all the saints in the future state, for all that are wise, wise for their souls and eternity. A man's wisdom now makes his face to shine (Eccles. viii. 1), but much more will it do so in that state where its power shall be perfected and its

services rewarded. 2. The more good any do in this world, especially to the souls of men, the greater will be their glory and reward in the other world. Those that turn men to righteousness, that turn sinners from the errors of their ways and help to save their souls from death (Jam. v. 20), will share in the glory of those they have helped to heaven, which will be a great addition to their own glory. 3. Ministers of Christ, who have obtained mercy of him to be faithful and successful, and so are made *burning and shining lights* in this world, shall shine very brightly in the other world, shall shine *as the stars*. Christ is the sun, the fountain, of the lights both of grace and glory; ministers, as stars, shine in both, with a light derived from him, and a diminutive light in comparison of him; yet to those that are *earthen vessels* it will be a glory infinitely transcending their deserts. They shall shine *as the stars* of different magnitudes, some in less, others in greater lustre; but, whereas the day is coming when the stars shall fall from heaven as leaves in autumn, these stars shall *shine for ever and ever*, shall never set, never be eclipsed.

VI. That this prophecy of those times, though sealed up now, would be of great use to those that should live then, v. 4. Daniel must now *shut up the words and seal the book* because the time would be long ere these things would be accomplished: and it was some comfort that the Jewish nation, though, in the infancy of their return from Babylon, while they were few and weak, they met with obstructions in their work, were not persecuted for their religion till a long time after, when they had grown to some strength and maturity. He must *seal the book*, because it would not be understood, and therefore would not be regarded, till the things contained in it were accomplished; but he must keep it safely, as a 'treasure of great value, laid up for the ages to come, to whom it would be of great service; for many shall then run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. Then this hidden treasure shall be opened, and many shall search into it, and dig for the knowledge of it, as for silver. They shall run to and fro, to enquire out copies of it, shall collate them, and see that they be true and authentic. They shall read it over and over, shall meditate upon it, and run it over in their minds; *discurrent—they shall discourse* of it, and talk it over among themselves, and compare notes about it, if by any means they may *sift out* the meaning of it; and thus *knowledge shall be increased*. By consulting this prophecy on this occasion they shall be led to search other scriptures, which shall contribute much to their advancement in useful knowledge; for then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord, Hos. vi. 3. Those that would have their knowledge increased must take pains, must not sit still in slothfulness and bare wishes,

but *run to and fro*, must make use of all the means of knowledge and improve all opportunities of getting their mistakes rectified, their doubts resolved, and their acquaintance with the things of God improved, to know more and to know better what they do know. And let us here see reason to hope that, 1. Those things of God which are now dark and obscure will hereafter be made clear, and easy to be understood. *Truth is the daughter of time.* Scripture prophecies will be expounded by the accomplishment of them; *therefore* they are given, and for that explication they are reserved. *Therefore* they are told us before, that, *when they do come to pass*, we may believe. 2. Those things of God which are despised and neglected, and thrown by as useless, shall be brought into reputation, shall be found to be of great service, and be brought into request; for divine revelation, however slighted for a time, shall be *magnified and made honourable*, and, above all, in the *judgment of the great day*, when the books shall be opened, and that book among the rest.

5 Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. 6 And *one* said to the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, How long *shall it be* to the end of these wonders? 7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that *it shall be* for a time, times, and a half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these *things* shall be finished. 8 And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my lord, what *shall be* the end of these *things*? 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. 11 And from the time that the daily *sacrifice* shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, *there shall be* a thousand two hundred and ninety days. 12 Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred

and five and thirty days. 13 But go thou thy way till the end *be*: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.

Daniel had been made to foresee the amazing revolutions of states and kingdoms, as far as the Israel of God was concerned in them; in them he foresaw troublous times to the church, suffering trying times, the prospect of which much affected him and filled him with concern. Now there were two questions proper to be asked upon this head:—*When shall the end be?* And, *What shall the end be?* These two questions are asked and answered here, in the close of the book; and though the comforts prescribed in the foregoing verses, one would think, were satisfactory enough, yet, for more abundant satisfaction, this is added.

I. The question, *When shall the end be?* is asked by an angel, v. 5, 6. Concerning this we may observe,

1. Who it was that asked the question. Daniel had had a vision of Christ in his glory, the *man clothed in linen*, ch. x. 5. But his discourse had been with the angel Gabriel, and now he *looks*, and *behold other two* (v. 5), two angels that he had not seen before, *one upon the bank of the river on one side and the other on the other side*, that, the river being between them, they might not whisper to one another, but what they said might be heard. Christ stood *on the waters of the river* (v. 6), *between the banks of Ulai*; it was therefore proper that the angels his attendants should stand on either bank, that they might be ready to go, one one way and the other the other way, as he should order them. These angels appeared, (1.) To adorn the vision, and make it the more illustrious; and to add to the glory of the Son of man, Heb. i. 6. Daniel had not seen them before, though it is probable that they were there; but now, when they began to speak, he looked up, and saw them. Note, The further we look into the things of God, and the more we converse with them, the more we shall see of those things, and still new discoveries will be made to us; those that know much, if they improve it, shall know more. (2.) To confirm the discovery, that *out of the mouth of two or three witnesses the word might be established*. Three angels appeared to Abraham. (3.) To inform themselves, to hear and ask questions; for the mysteries of God's kingdom are things which the *angels desire to look into* (1 Pet. i. 12) and they are *known to the church*, Eph. iii. 10. Now one of these two angels said, *When shall the end be?* Perhaps they both asked, first one and then the other, but Daniel heard only one.

2. To whom this question was put, to the *man clothed in linen*, of whom we read before (ch. x. 5), to Christ our great high priest, who *was upon the waters of the river*, and whose spokesman, or interpreter, the angel



Gabriel had all this while been. This river was Hiddekel (*ch. x. 4*), the same with Tigris, the place whereabout many of the events prophesied of would happen; there therefore is the scene laid. Hiddekel was mentioned as one of the rivers that watered the garden of Eden (*Gen. ii. 14*); fitly therefore does Christ stand upon that river, for by him the trees in the paradise of God are watered. *Waters* signify *people*, and so his standing upon the waters denotes his dominion over all; he *sits upon the flood* (*Ps. xxix. 10*); he *treads upon the waters of the sea*, *Job ix. 8*. And Christ, to show that this was he, in the days of his flesh *walked upon the waters*, *Matt. xiv. 25*. He was *above the waters of the river* (so some read it); he appeared in the air over the river.

3. What the question was: *How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?* Daniel would not ask the question, because he would not pry into what was hidden, nor seem inquisitive concerning the times and the seasons, which the Father has *put in his own power*, *Acts i. 7*. But, that he might have the satisfaction of the answer, the angel put the question in his hearing. Our Lord Jesus sometimes answered the questions which his disciples were afraid or ashamed to ask, *John xvi. 19*. The angel asked as one concerned, *How long shall it be?* What is the time prefixed in the divine counsels for the *end of these wonders*, these suffering trying times, that are to pass over the people of God? Note, (1.) The troubles of the church are the *wonder* of angels. They are astonished that God will suffer his church to be thus afflicted, and are anxious to know what good he will do his church by its afflictions. (2.) Good angels know no more of things to come than God is pleased to discover to them, much less do evil angels. (3.) The holy angels in heaven are concerned for the church on earth, and lay to heart its afflictions; how much more then should we, who are more immediately related to it, and have so much of our peace in its peace?

4. What answer was returned to it by him who is indeed the *numberer of secrets*, and knows things to come.

(1.) Here is a more general account given of the continuance of these troubles to the angel that made the enquiry (*v. 7*), that they shall continue *for a time, times, and a half*, that is, a year, two years, and half a year, as was before intimated (*ch. vii. 25*), but the one half of a prophetic week. Some understand it indefinitely, a certain time for an uncertain; it shall be *for a time* (a considerable time), for *times* (a longer time yet, double what it was thought at first that it would be), and yet indeed it shall be but *half a time*, or a part of a time; when it is over it shall seem not half so much as was feared. But it is rather to be taken for a certain time; we meet with it in the Revelation, under the title sometimes of three days

and a half, put for three years and a half, sometimes forty-two months, sometimes 1260 days. Now this determination of the time is here, [1.] Confirmed by an oath. The man *clothed in linen* lifted up both his hands to heaven, and swore by him that lives for ever and ever that it should be so. Thus the *mighty angel* whom St. John saw is brought in, with a plain reference to this vision, standing with his *right foot on the sea* and his *left foot on the earth*, and with his hand lifted up to heaven, swearing that *there shall be no longer delay*, *Rev. x. 5, 6*. This *Mighty One* that Daniel saw stood with *both feet on the water*, and swore with *both hands* lifted up. Note, An oath is of use for confirmation; God only is to be sworn by, for he is the proper Judge to whom we are to appeal; and lifting up the hand is a very proper and significant sign to be used in a solemn oath. [2.] It is illustrated with a reason. God will suffer him to prevail till he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people. God will suffer him to do his worst, and run his utmost length, and then *all these things shall be finished*. Note, God's time to succour and relieve his people is when their affairs are brought to the last extremity; in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen that Isaac is saved just when he lies ready to be sacrificed. Now the event answered the prediction; Josephus says expressly, in his book of the wars of the Jews, that Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanes, surprised Jerusalem by force, and held it three years and six months, and was then cast out of the country by the Asmoneans or Maccabees. Christ's public ministry continued three years and a half, during which time he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and lived in poverty and disgrace; and then when his power seemed to be quite scattered at his death, and his enemies triumphed over him, he obtained the most glorious victory and said, *It is finished*.

(2.) Here is something added more particularly concerning the time of the continuance of those troubles, in what is said to Daniel, *v. 11, 12*, where we have, [1.] The event fixed from which the time of the trouble is to be dated, from the *taking away of the daily sacrifice* by Antiochus, and the *setting up of the image of Jupiter* upon the altar, which was the *abomination of desolation*. They must reckon their troubles to begin indeed when they were deprived of the benefit of public ordinances; that was to them the *beginning of sorrows*; that was what they laid most to heart. [2.] The continuance of their trouble; it shall last 1290 days, *three years and seven months*, or (as some reckon) *three years, six months, and fifteen days*; and then, it is probable, the daily sacrifice was restored, and the abomination of desolation taken away, in remembrance of which the *feast of dedication* was observed even to our Saviour's time, *John x. 22*. Though it does



not appear by the history that it was exactly so long to a day, yet it appears that the beginning of the trouble was in the 145th year of the Seleucidæ, and the end of it in the 148th year; and either the restoring of the sacrifice, and the taking away of the image, were just so many days after, or some other previous event that was remarkable, which is not recorded. There are many particular times fixed in the scripture-prophecies, which it does not appear by any history, sacred or profane, that the event answered, and yet no doubt it did punctually; as Isa. xvi. 14. [3.] The completing of their deliverance, or at least a further advance towards it, which is here set forty-five days after the former, and, some think, points at the death of Antiochus, 1335 days after his profaning the temple. *Blessed is he that waits and comes to that time.* It is said (1 Mac. vi. 16) that Antiochus died in the 149th year of the kingdom of the Greeks, and (2 Mac. ix. 28; x. 1) that the Maccabees, under a divine conduct, recovered the temple and the city. Many good interpreters make these to be prophetic days (that is, so many years), and date them from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; but what events they then fall upon they are not agreed. Others date them from the corruption of the gospel-worship by the antichrist, whose reign is confined in the Apocalypse to 1260 days (that is, years), at the end of which he shall begin to fall; but thirty years after he shall be quite fallen, at the end of 1290 days; and whoever lives forty years longer, to 1335 days, will see glorious times indeed. Whether it looks so far forward or no I cannot tell; but this, however, we may learn, *First*, That there is a time fixed for the termination of the church's troubles, and the bringing about of her deliverance, and that this time will be punctually observed to a day. *Secondly*, That this time must be waited for with faith and patience. *Thirdly*, That, when it comes, it will abundantly recompense us for our long expectations of it. *Blessed is he who, having waited long, comes to it at last, for he will then have reason to say, Lo, this is our God, and we have waited for him.*

II. The question, *What shall the end be?* is asked by Daniel, and an answer given to it. Observe,

1. Why Daniel asked this question; it was because, though he *heard what was said* to the angel, yet he did not *understand* it, v. 8. Daniel was a very intelligent man, and had been conversant in visions and prophecies, and yet here he was puzzled; he did not understand the meaning of the *time, times, and the part of a time*, at least not so clearly and with so much certainty as he wished. Note, The best men are often much at a loss in their enquiries concerning divine things, and meet with that which they do not *understand*. But the better they are the more sensible they are of their own weak-

ness and ignorance, and the more ready to acknowledge them.

2. What the question was: *O my Lord! What shall be the end of these things?* He directs his enquiry not to the angel that talked with him, but immediately to Christ, for to whom else should we go with our enquiries? "What shall be the final issue of these events? What do they tend to? What will they end in?" Note, When we take a view of the affairs of this world, and of the church of God in it, we cannot but think, What will be the end of these things? We see things move as if they would end in the utter ruin of God's kingdom among men. When we observe the prevalence of vice and impiety, the decay of religion, the sufferings of the righteous, and the triumphs of the ungodly over them, we may well ask, *O my Lord! what will be the end of these things?* But this may satisfy us in general, that all will end well at last. Great is the truth, and will prevail at long-run. All opposing rule, principality, and power, will be put down, and holiness and love will triumph; and be in honour, to eternity. The end, this end, will come.

3. What answer is returned to this question. Besides what refers to the time (v. 11, 12), of which before, here are some general instructions given to Daniel, with which he is dismissed from further attendance.

(1.) He must content himself with the discoveries that had been made to him, and not enquire any further: "*Go thy way, Daniel; let it suffice thee that thou hast been admitted thus far to the foresight of things to come, but stop here. Go thy way* about the king's business again, *ch. viii. 27. Go thy way, and record what thou hast seen and heard, for the benefit of posterity, and covet not to see and hear more at present.*" Note, Communion with God is not our continual feast in this world; we sometimes are taken to be witnesses of Christ's glory, and we say, *It is good to be here*; but we must go down from the mount, and have there no continuing city. Those that know much *know but in part*, and still see there is a great deal that they are kept in the dark about, and are likely to be so till the veil is rent; hitherto their knowledge shall go, but no further. "*Go thy way, Daniel, satisfied with what thou hast.*"

(2.) He must not expect that what had been said to him would be fully understood till it was accomplished: *The words are closed up and sealed, are involved in perplexities, and are likely to be so, till the time of the end, till the end of these things; nay, till the end of all things.* Daniel was ordered to *seal the book to the time of the end, v. 4.* The Jews used to say, *When Elias comes he will tell us all things.* "They are *closed up and sealed*, that is, the discovery designed to be made by them is now fully settled and completed; nothing is to be added to it nor



taken from it, for it is *closed up and sealed*; ask not therefore after more." *Nescire velle quæ magister maximus docere non vult. erudita inscitia est—He has learned much who is willing to be ignorant of those things which the great teacher does not choose to impart.*

(3.) He must count upon no other than that, as long as the world stands, there will still be in it such a mixture as now we see there is of good and bad, v. 10. We long to see all wheat and no tares in God's field, all corn and no chaff in God's floor; but it will not be till the time of ingathering, till the winnowing day, comes; both must *grow together until the harvest*. As it has been, so it is, and will be, *The wicked shall do wickedly, but the wise shall understand*. In this, as in other things, St. John's Revelation closes as Daniel did. Rev. xxii. 11, *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still*. [1.] There is no remedy but that wicked people *will do wickedly*; and such people there are and will be in the world to the end of time. *So said the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceeds from the wicked* (1 Sam. xxiv. 13); and the observation of the moderns says the same. Bad men will do bad things; and a *corrupt tree will never bring forth good fruit*. Do men *gather grapes of thorns*, or bring forth good things from an evil treasure in the heart? No; wicked practices are the natural products of wicked principles and dispositions. *Marvel not at the matter then*, Eccl. v. 8. We are told, before, that the *wicked will do wickedly*; we can expect no better from them: but, which is worse, *none of the wicked shall understand*. This is either, *First*, A part of their sin. *They will not understand*; they shut their eyes against the light, and none so blind as those that will not see. *Therefore they are wicked because they will not understand*. If they did but rightly know the truths of God, they would readily obey the laws of God, Ps. lxxxii. 5. Wilful sin is the effect of wilful ignorance; they *will not understand* because *they are wicked*; they *hate the light*, and come not to the light, *because their deeds are evil*, John ii. 19. Or, *Secondly*, It is a part of their punishment; they will do wickedly, and therefore God has given them up to *blindness of mind*, and has said concerning them, *They shall not understand, nor be converted and healed*, Matt. xiii. 14, 15. God will not give them eyes to see, because they will do wickedly, Deut. xxix. 4. [2.] Yet, bad as the world is, God will secure to himself a remnant of good people in it; still there shall be some, there shall be many, to whom the providences and ordinances of God shall be a *savour of life unto life*, while to others they are a *savour of death unto death*. *First*, The providences of God shall do them good: *Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried*, by their troubles (compare ch. xi. 35), by the same troubles which will but stir up

the corruptions of the wicked and make them do more wickedly. Note, The afflictions of good people are designed for their trial; but by these trials they are *purified* and *made white*, their corruptions are purged out, their graces are brightened, and made both more vigorous and more conspicuous, and are *found to praise, and honour, and glory*, 1 Pet. i. 7. To those who are themselves sanctified and good every event is sanctified, and works for good, and helps to make them better. *Secondly*, The word of God shall do them good. When the *wicked understand not*, but stumble at the word, the *wise shall understand*. Those who are wise in practice shall understand doctrine; those who are influenced and governed by the divine law and love shall be illuminated with a divine light. For if any man will do his will he shall *know the truth*, John vii. 17. *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser*.

(4.) He must comfort himself with the pleasing prospect of his own happiness in death, in judgment, and to eternity, v. 13. Daniel was now very old, and had been long engaged both in an intimate acquaintance with heaven and in a great deal of public business on this earth. And now he must think of bidding farewell to this present state: *Go thou thy way till the end be*. [1.] It is good for us all to think much of going away from this world; we are still going, and must be gone shortly, gone the way of all the earth. That must be our way; but this is our comfort, We shall not go till God calls for us to another world, and till he has done with us in this world, till he says, "*Go thou thy way*; thou hast finished thy testimony, done thy work, and accomplished as a hireling thy day, therefore now, *Go thy way*, and leave it to others to take thy room." [2.] When a good man goes his way from this world he enters into rest: "*Thou shalt rest* from all thy present toils and agitations, and shalt not see the evils that are coming on the next generation." Never can a child of God say more pertinently than in his dying moments, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul!* [3.] Time and days will have an end; not only our time and days will end very shortly, but all times and days will have an end at length; yet a little while, and time shall be no more, but all its revolutions will be numbered and finished. [4.] Our rest in the grave will be but *till the end of the days*; and then the peaceful rest will be happily disturbed by a joyful resurrection. Job foresaw this when he said of the dead, *Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep*, implying that then they shall, Job xiv. 12. [5.] We must every one of us *stand in our lot at the end of the days*. In the judgment of the great day we must have our allotment according to what we were, and what we did, in the body, either, *Come, you blessed or,*

Go, you cursed; and we must stand for ever in that lot. It was a comfort to Daniel, it is a comfort to all the saints, that, whatever their lot is in the days of time, they shall have a happy lot in the end of the days, shall have their lot among the chosen. And it ought to be the great care and concern of every one of us to secure a happy lot at last in the end of the days, and then we may well be content with our present lot, welcome the will of God. [6.] A believing hope and prospect of a blessed lot in the heavenly Canaan, at the end of the days, will be an effectual support to us when we are going our way out of this world, and will furnish us with living comforts in dying moments.

AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

H O S E A.

- I. WE have now before us the twelve minor prophets, which some of the ancients, in reckoning up the books of the Old Testament, put all together, and reckon but as *one book*. They are called the minor prophets, not because their writings are of any less authority or usefulness than those of the greater prophets, or as if these prophets were less in God's account or might be so in ours than the other, but only because they are shorter, and less in bulk, than the other. We have reason to think that these prophets preached as much as the others, but that they did not write so much, nor is so much of their preaching kept upon record. Many excellent prophets wrote nothing, and others but little, who yet were very useful in their day. And so in the Christian church there have been many burning and shining lights, who are not known to posterity by their writings, and yet were no way inferior in gifts, and graces, and serviceableness to their own generation, than those who are; and some who have left but little behind them, and make no great figure among authors, were yet as valuable men as the more voluminous writers. These twelve small prophets, Josephus says, were put into one volume by the men of the great synagogue in Ezra's time, of which learned and pious body of men the last three of these twelve prophets are supposed to have been themselves members. These are what remained of the scattered pieces of inspired writing. Antiquaries value the *fragmenta veterum*—the fragments of antiquity; these are the fragments of prophecy, which are carefully gathered up by the divine Providence and the care of the church, that nothing might be lost, as St. Paul's short epistles after his long ones. The son of Sirach speaks of these twelve prophets with honour, as men that *strengthened Jacob*, *Eccles.* xlix. 10. Nine of these prophets prophesied before the captivity, and the last three after the return of the Jews to their own land. Some difference there is in the order of these books. We place them as the ancient Hebrew did; and all agree to put Hosea first; but the ancient Septuagint places the first six in this order—Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. The thing is not material. And, if we covet to place them according to their seniority, as to some of them we shall find no certainty.
- II. WE have before us the prophecy of Hosea, who was the first of all the writing prophets, being raised up somewhat before the time of Isaiah. The ancients say, He was of Beth-shemesh, and of the tribe of Issachar. He continued very long a prophet; the Jews reckoned that he prophesied nearly fourscore and ten years; so that, as Jerome observes, he prophesied of the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes when it was at a great distance, and lived himself to see and lament it, and to improve it when it was over, for warning to its sister kingdom. The scope of his prophecy is to discover sin, and to denounce the judgments of God against a people that would not be reformed. The style is very concise and sententious, above any of the prophets; and in some places it seems to be like the book of Proverbs, without connexion, and rather to be called Hosea's *sayings* than Hosea's *sermons*. And a weighty adage may sometimes do more service than a laboured discourse. Huetius observes that many passages in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to refer to, and to be borrowed from, the prophet Hosea, who wrote a good while before them. As *Jer.* vii. 34; xvi. 9; xxv. 10; and *Ezek.* xxvi. 13, speak the same with *Hos.* ii. 11; so *Ezek.* xvi. 16, &c., is taken from *Hos.* ii. 8. And that promise of *serving the Lord their God*, and *David their king*, *Jer.* xxx. 8, 9, *Ezek.* xxxiv. 23, *Hosea* had before, *ch.* iii. 5. And *Ezek.* xix. 12 is taken from *Hos.* xiii. 15. Thus one prophet confirms and corroborates another; and all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit.



## CHAP. I.

The mind of God is revealed to this prophet, and by him to the people, in the first three chapters, by signs and types, but afterwards only by discourse. In this chapter we have, I. The general title of the whole book, ver. 1. II. Some particular instructions which he was ordered to give to the people of God. 1. He must convince them of their sin in going a whoring from God, by marrying a wife of whoredoms, ver. 2, 3. 2. He must foretell the ruin coming upon them for their sin, in the names of his sons, which signified God's disowning and abandoning them, ver. 4—6, 8, 9. 3. He must speak comfortably to the kingdom of Judah, which still retained the pure worship of God, and assure them of the salvation of the Lord, ver. 7. 4. He must give an intimation of the great mercy God had in store both for Israel and Judah, in the latter days (ver. 10, 11), for in this prophecy many precious promises of mercy are mixed with the threatenings of wrath.

THE word of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

1. Here is the prophet's name and surname, which he himself, as other prophets, prefixes to his prophecy, for the satisfaction of all that he is ready to attest what he writes to be of God; he sets his hand to it, as that which he will stand by. His name, *Hosea*, or *Hoshea* (for it is the very same with Joshua's original name), signifies a *saviour*; for prophets were instruments of salvation to the people of God, so are faithful ministers; they help to save many a soul from death, by saving it from sin. His surname was *Ben-Beeri*, or *the son of Beeri*. As with us now, so with them then, some had their surname from their place, as Micah the Morashite, Nahum the Elkoshite; others from their parents, as Joel the son of Bethuel, and here Hosea the son of Beeri. And perhaps they made use of that distinction when the eminence of their parents was such as would bring honour upon them; but it is a groundless conceit of the Jews that where a prophet's father is named he also was a prophet. *Beeri* signifies a *well*, which may put us in mind of the fountain of life and living waters from which prophets are drawn and must be continually drawing. 2. Here are his authority and commission: *The word of the Lord came to him. It was to him*; it came with power and efficacy to him; it was revealed to him as a real thing, and not a fancy or imagination of his own, in some such way as God then discovered himself to his servants the prophets. What he said and wrote was by divine inspiration; it was *by the word of the Lord*, as St. Paul speaks concerning that which he had purely by revelation, 1 Thess. iv. 15. Therefore this book was always received among the canonical books of the Old Testament, which is confirmed by what is quoted out of it in the New Testament, Matt. ii. 15; ix. 13; xii. 7; Rom. ix. 25, 26; 1 Pet. ii. 10. For the word of the Lord endures for ever. 3. Here is a particular account of the times in which he prophesied—in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king

of Israel. We have only this general date of his prophecy, and not the date of any particular part of it, as, before, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and, afterwards, in Haggai and Zechariah. Here is only one king of Israel named, though there were many more within this time, because, having mentioned the kings of Judah, there was no necessity of naming the other; and, they being all wicked, he took no pleasure in naming them, nor would do them the honour. Now by this account here given of the several reigns in which Hosea prophesied (and it should seem the word of the Lord still came to him, more or less, at times, throughout all these reigns) it appears, (1.) That he prophesied a long time, that he began when he was very young, which gave him the advantage of strength and sprightliness, and that he continued at his work till he was very old, which gave him the advantage of experience and authority. It was a great honour to him to be thus long employed in such good work, and a great mercy to the people to have a minister so long among them that so well knew their state, and naturally cared for it, one they had been long used to and who therefore was the more likely to be useful to them. And yet, for aught that appears, he did but little good among them; the longer they enjoyed him the less they regarded him; they despised his youth first, and afterwards his age. (2.) That he passed through a variety of conditions. Some of these kings were very good, and, it is likely, countenanced and encouraged him; others were very bad, who (we may suppose) frowned upon him and discouraged him; and yet he was still the same. God's ministers must expect to pass through *honour and dishonour, evil report and good report*, and must resolve in both to hold fast their integrity and keep close to their work. (3.) That he began to prophesy at a time when the judgments of God were abroad, when God was himself contending in a more immediate way with that sinful people, who *fell into the hands of the Lord*, before they were turned over into the hands of man; for in the days of Uzziah, and of Jeroboam his contemporary, the dreadful earthquake was, mentioned Zech. xiv. 5 and Amos i. 1. And then was the plague of locusts, Joel i. 2—4; Amos vii. 1; Hos. iv. 3. The rod of God is sent to enforce the word and the Word of God is sent to explain the rod, yet neither prevails till God by his Spirit opens the ear to instruction and discipline. (4.) That he began to prophesy in Israel at a time when their kingdom was in a flourishing prosperous condition, for so it was in the reign of Jeroboam the second, as we find 2 Kings xiv. 25, *He restored the coast of Israel and God saved them by his hand*; yet then Hosea boldly tells them of their sins and foretells their destruction. Men are not to be flattered in their sinful ways because



they prosper in the world, but even then must be faithfully reprov'd, and plainly told that their prosperity will not be their security, nor will it last long if they *go on still in their trespasses.*

2 The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing from the LORD.* 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. 4 And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little *while*, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. 6 And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. 7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

These words, *The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea*, may refer either, 1. To that glorious set of prophets which was raised up about this time. About this time there lived and prophesied Joel, Amos, Micah, Jonah, Obadiah, and Isaiah; but Hosea was the first of them that foretold the destruction of Israel; the *beginning of this word of the Lord was by him.* We read in the history of this Jeroboam here named (2 Kings xiv. 27) that *the Lord had not yet said he would blot out the name of Israel*, but soon after he said he would, and Hosea was the man that began to say it, which made it so much the harder task to him, to be the first that should carry an unpleasing message and some time before any were raised up to second him. Or, rather, 2. To Hosea's own prophecies. This was the first message God sent him upon to this people, to tell them that they were *an evil and an adulterous generation.* He might have desired to be excused from dealing so roughly with them till he had gained authority and reputation, and some interest in their affections. No; he must *begin with this*, that they might know what to expect from a prophet of the Lord. Nay, he must not only preach this to them, but he must write it, and publish

it, and leave it upon record as a witness against them. Now here,

1. The prophet must, as it were in a looking-glass, show them *their sin*, and show it to be exceedingly sinful, exceedingly hateful. The prophet is ordered to *take unto him a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms*, v. 2. And he did so, v. 3. He married a woman of ill fame, *Gomer the daughter of Diblaim*, not one that had been married and had committed adultery, for then she must have been put to death, but one that had lived scandalously in the single state. To marry such a one was not *malum in se—evil in itself*, but only *malum per accidens—incidentally an evil*, not prudent, decent, or expedient, and therefore forbidden to the priests, and which, if it were really done, would be an affliction to the prophet (it is threatened as a curse on Amaziah that his wife should be a harlot, Amos vii. 17), but not a sin when God commanded it for a holy end; nay, if commanded, it was his duty, and he must trust God with his reputation. But most commentators think that it was done *in vision*, or that it is no more than a parable; and that was a way of teaching commonly used among the ancients, particularly prophets; what they meant of others they *transferred to themselves in a figure*, as St. Paul speaks, 1 Cor. iv. 6. He must take a *wife of whoredoms*, and have such children by her as every one would suspect, though born in wedlock, to be *children of whoredoms*, begotten in adultery, because it is too common for those who have lived lewdly in the single state to live no better in the married state. "Now" (saith God) "Hosea, this people is to me such a dishonour, and such a grief and vexation, as a *wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms* would be to thee. *For the land has committed great whoredoms.*" In all instances of wickedness they had departed from the Lord; but their idolatry especially is the whoredom they are here chaged with. Giving that glory to any creature which is due to God alone is such an injury and affront to God as for a wife to embrace the bosom of a stranger is to her husband. It is especially so in those that have made a profession of religion, and have been taken into covenant with God; it is breaking the marriage-bond; it is a heinous odious sin, and, as much as any thing, besots the mind and takes away the heart. *Idolatry is great whoredom*, worse than any other; it is departing from *the Lord*, to whom we lie under greater obligations than any wife does or can do to her husband. *The land has committed whoredom*; it is not here and there a particular person that is guilty of idolatry, but the whole land is polluted with it; the sin has become national, the disease epidemical. What an odious thing would it be for the prophet, a *holy man*, to have a whorish wife, and children whorish like her!



What an exercise would it be of his patience, and, if she persisted in it, what could be expected but that he should give her a bill of divorce! And is it not then much more offensive to the *holy God* to have such a people as this to be called by his name and have a place in his house? How great is his patience with them! And how justly may he cast them off! It was as if he should have married Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, who probably was at that time a noted harlot. The land of Israel was like Gomer the daughter of Diblaim. Gomer signifies *corruption*; Diblaim signifies *two cakes*, or *lumps of figs*; this denotes that Israel was near to ruin, and that their luxury and sensuality were the cause of it. They were as the *evil figs* that could not be eaten, they were so evil. It intimates sin to be the daughter of plenty and destruction the daughter of the abuse of plenty. Some give this sense of the command here given to the prophet: "Go, take thee a wife of *whoredoms*, for, if thou shouldst go to seek for an honest modest woman, thou wouldst not find any such, for the whole land, and all the people of it, are given to whoredom, the usual concomitant of idolatry."

II. The prophet must, as it were through a perspective glass, show them their ruin; and this he does in the names given to the children born of this adulteress; for as *lust*, when it has *conceived*, brings forth sin, so sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

1. He foretels the fall of the royal family in the name he is appointed to give to his first child, which was a son: *Call his name Jezreel*, v. 4. We find that the prophet Isaiah gave prophetic names to his children (Isa. vii. 3; viii. 3), so this prophet here. Jezreel signifies *the seed of God* (so they should have been); but it signifies also the *scattered of God*; they shall be as sheep on the mountains, that have no shepherds. *Call them not Israel*, which signifies *dominion*, they have lost all the honour of that name; but call them Jezreel, which signifies *dispersion*, for those that have departed from the Lord will wander endlessly. Hitherto they have been scattered as seed; let them now be scattered as chaff. Jezreel was the name of one of the royal seats of the kings of Israel; it was a beautiful city, seated in a pleasant valley, and it is with allusion to that city that this child is called Jezreel, for yet a little while and I will *avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*. Observe here, (1.) Who it is that God has a controversy with; it is the *house of Jehu*, from whom the present king, Jeroboam, was lineally descended. The house of Jehu smarted for the sins of Jehu, for God often lays up men's iniquity for their children and visits it upon them. It is *the kingdom of the house of Israel*, which may be meant either of the present royal family, that of Jehu, which God did quickly *cause to cease* (for

the son of this Jeroboam, Zechariah, reigned but *six months*, and he was the last of Jehu's race), or of the whole kingdom in general, which continued corrupt and wicked, and which was *made to cease* in the reign of Hoshea, about seventy years after; and with God that is but a *little while*. Note, Neither the pomp of kings nor the power of kingdoms can secure them from God's destroying judgments, if they continue to rebel against him. (2.) What is the ground of this controversy: *I will revenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*, the blood which Jehu shed at Jezreel, when, by commission from God and in obedience to his command, he utterly destroyed the house of Ahab, and all that were in alliance with it, with all the worshippers of Baal. God approved of what he did (2 Kings x. 30): *Thou hast done well in executing that which is right in my eyes*; and yet here God will *avenge that blood upon the house of Jehu*, when the time has expired during which it was promised that his family should reign, even to the fourth generation. But how comes the same action to be both rewarded and punished? Very justly; the matter of it was good; it was the execution of a righteous sentence passed upon the house of Ahab, and, as such, it was rewarded; but Jehu did it not in a right manner; he aimed at his own advancement, not at the glory of God, and mingled his own resentments with the execution of God's justice. He did it with a malice against the sinners, but not with any antipathy to the sin; for he kept up the worship of the golden calves, and *took no heed to walk in the law of God*, 2 Kings x. 31. And therefore when the measure of the iniquity of his house was full, and God came to reckon with them, the first article in the account is (and, being first, it is put for all the rest) for the blood of the house of Ahab, here called the *blood of Jezreel*. Thus when the house of Baasha was rooted out it was because he did *like the house of Jeroboam, and because he killed him*, 1 Kings xvi. 7. Note, Those that are entrusted with the administration of justice are concerned to see to it that they do it from a right principle and with a right intention, and that they do not themselves live in those sins which they punish in others, lest even their just executions should be reckoned for, another day, as little less than murders. (3.) How far the controversy shall proceed; it shall be not a correction, but a destruction. Some make those words, *I will visit, or appoint, the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*, to signify, not as we read it the revenging of that bloodshed, but the repeating of that bloodshed: "I will punish the house of Jehu, as I punished the house of Ahab, because Jehu did not take warning by the punishment of his predecessors, but trod in the steps of their idolatry. And after the house of Jehu is destroyed *I will cause to*

cease the kingdom of the house of Israel; I will begin to bring it down, though now it flourish." After the death of Zechariah, the last of the house of Jehu, the kingdom of the ten tribes went to decay, and dwindled sensibly. And, in order to the ruin of it, it is threatened (v. 5), *I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel; the strength of the warriors of Israel*, so the Chaldee. God will disable them either to defend themselves or to resist their enemies. As the bow abiding in strength, and being renewed in the hand, intimates a growing power, so the breaking of the bow intimates a sinking ruined power. The bow shall be broken in the valley of Jezreel, where, probably, the armoury was; or, it may be, in that valley some battle was fought, wherein the kingdom of Israel was very much weakened. Note, There is no fence against God's controversy; when he comes forth against a people their strong bows are soon broken and their strong-holds broken down. In the valley of Jezreel they shed that blood which the righteous God would in that very place avenge upon them; as some notorious malefactors are hanged in chains just where the villany they suffer for was perpetrated, that the punishment may answer the sin.

2. He foretels God's abandoning the whole nation in the name he gives to the second child. This was a daughter, as the former was a son, to intimate that both sons and daughters had corrupted their way. Some make it to signify that Israel grew effeminate, and was thereby enfeebled and made weak. Call the name of this daughter *Lo-ruhamah*—not beloved (so it is translated Rom. ix. 25), or not having obtained mercy, so it is translated 1 Pet. ii. 10. It comes all to one. This reads the doom of the house of Israel: *I will no more have mercy upon them*. It intimates that God had shown them great mercy, but they had abused his favours, and forfeited them, and now he would show them favour no more. Note, Those that forsake their own mercies for lying vanities have reason to expect that their own mercies should forsake them, and that they should be left to their lying vanities, Jonah ii. 8. Sin turns away the mercy of God even from the house of Israel, his own professing people, whose case is sad indeed when God says that he will no more have mercy upon them. And then it follows, *I will utterly take them away*, will utterly remove them (so some), will utterly pluck them up, so others. Note, When the streams of mercy are stopped we can expect no other than that the vials of wrath should be opened. Those whom God will no more have mercy upon shall be utterly taken away, as dross and dung. The word for taking away sometimes signifies to forgive sin; and some take it in that sense here: *I will no more have mercy upon them, though in pardoning I have pardoned them heretofore*. Though God has borne long, he will not

bear always, with a people that hate to be reformed. Or, *I will no more have mercy upon them, that I should in any wise pardon them*, or (as our margin reads it) *that I should altogether pardon them*. If pardoning mercy is denied, no other mercy can be expected, for that opens the door to all the rest. Some make this to speak comfort: *I will no more have mercy upon them till in pardoning I shall pardon them*, that is, till the Redeemer comes to Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob. The Chaldee reads it, *But, if they repent, in pardoning I will pardon them*. Even the greatest sinners, if in time they bethink themselves and return, will find that there is forgiveness with God.

III. He must show them what mercy God had in store for the house of Judah, at the same time that he was thus contending with the house of Israel (v. 7): *But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah*. Note, Though some are justly cast off for their disobedience, yet God will always secure to himself a remnant that shall be the vessels and monuments of mercy. When divine justice is glorified in some, yet there are others in whom free grace is glorified. And, though some through unbelief are broken off, yet God will have a church in this world till the end of time. It aggravates the rejection of Israel that God will have mercy on Judah, and not on them, and magnifies God's mercy to Judah that, though they also have done wickedly, yet God did not reject them, as he rejected Israel: *I will have mercy upon them and will save them*. Note, Our salvation is owing purely to God's mercy, and not to any merit of our own. Now,

1. This, without doubt, refers to the temporal salvations which God wrought for Judah in a distinguishing way, the favours shown to them and not to Israel. When the Assyrian armies had destroyed Samaria, and carried the ten tribes away into captivity, they proceeded to besiege Jerusalem; but God had mercy on the house of Judah, and saved them by the vast slaughter which an angel made, in one night, in the camp of the Assyrians; then they were saved by the Lord their God immediately, and not by sword or bow. When the ten tribes were continued in their captivity, and their land was possessed by others, they being utterly taken away, God had mercy on the house of Judah and saved them, and, after seventy years, brought them back, not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, Zech. iv. 6. *I will save them by the Lord their God*, that is, by myself. God will be exalted in his own strength, will take the work into his own hands. That salvation is sure which he undertakes to be the author of; for, if he will work, none shall hinder. And that salvation is most acceptable which he does by himself. So the Lord alone did lead him. The less there is of man in any salvation, and the more of God, the brighter it shines and the



sweeter it tastes. I will save them in the word of the Lord (so the Chaldee), for the sake of Christ, the eternal word, and by his power. *I will save them not by bow nor by sword*, that is, (1.) They shall be saved when they are reduced to so low an ebb that they have neither bow nor sword to defend themselves with, Judg. v. 8; 1 Sam. xiii. 22. (2.) They shall be saved by the Lord when they are brought off from trusting to their own strength and their weapons of war, Ps. xlv. 6. (3.) They shall be saved easily, without the trouble of sword and bow, v. 7. Isa. ix. 5, *I will save them by the Lord their God*. In calling him *their God*, he upbraids the ten tribes who had cast him off from being *theirs*, for which reason he had cast them off, and intimates what was the true reason why he had mercy, distinguishing mercy, for the house of Judah, and saved them: it was in pursuance of his covenant with them as the Lord their God, and in recompence for their faithful adherence to him and to his word and worship. But,

2. This may refer also to the salvation of Judah from idolatry, which qualified and prepared them for their other salvations. And this is indeed a salvation by the Lord their God; it is wrought only by the power of his grace, and can never be wrought by sword or bow. Just at the time that the kingdom of Israel was utterly taken away, under Hoshea, the kingdom of Judah was gloriously reformed, under Hezekiah, and was therefore preserved; and in Babylon God saved them from their idolatry first, and then from their captivity.

3. Some make this promise to look forward to the great salvation which, in the fulness of time, was to be wrought out by the Lord our God, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save his people from their sins.

8 Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. 9 Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. 10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, *Ye are not my people*, there it shall be said unto them, *Ye are the sons of the living God*. 11 Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

We have here a prediction,

I. Of the rejection of Israel for a time, which is signified by the name of another child that Hosea had by his adulterous spouse, v. 8, 9. And still we must observe that those children whose names carried these direful omens in them to Israel were all *children of whoredoms* (v. 2), all born of the harlot that Hosea married, to intimate that the ruin of Israel was the natural product of the sin of Israel. If they had not first revolted from God, they would never have been rejected by him; God never leaves any till they first leave him. Here is, 1. The birth of this child: *When she had weaned her daughter, she conceived and bore a son*. Notice is taken of the delay of the birth of this child, which was to carry in its name a certain presage of their utter rejection, to intimate God's patience with them, and his unwillingness to proceed to extremity. Some think that her bearing another son signifies that people's persisting in their wickedness; lust still conceived and brought forth sin. They added to do evil (so the Chaldee paraphrase expounds it); they were old in adulteries, and obstinate. 2. The name given him: *Call him Lo-ammi—Not my people*. When they were told that God would no more have mercy on them they regarded it not, but buoyed up themselves with this conceit, that they were God's people, whom he could not but have mercy on. And therefore he plucks that staff from under them, and disowns all relation to them: *You are not my people, and I will not be your God*. "*I will not be yours* (so the word is); I will be in no relation to you, will have nothing to do with you; I will not be your King, your Father, your patron and protector." We supply it very well with that which includes all, "*I will not be your God; I will not be to you what I have been, nor what you vainly expect I should be, nor what I would have been if you had kept close to me*." Observe, "*You are not my people*: you do not act as becomes my people; you are not observant of me and obedient to me, as my people should be; you are not my people, but the people of this and the other dunghill-deity; and therefore I will not own you for my people, will not protect you, will not put in any claim to you, not demand you, not deliver you out of the hands of those that have seized you; let them take you; you are none of mine. You will not have me to be your God, but pay your homage to the pretenders, and therefore *I will not be your God*; you shall have no interest in me, shall expect no benefit from me." Note, Our being taken into covenant with God is owing purely to him and to his grace, for then it begins on his side: *I will be to them a God*, and then they shall be to me a people; we love him because he first loved us. But our being cast out of covenant is owing purely to ourselves and our own folly. The breach is on man's side: *You are not my people, and therefore I will not be your God*; if God

*hate any*, it is because they *first hated him*. This was fulfilled in Israel when they were *utterly taken away into the land of Assyria*, and their place knew them no more. They were no longer *God's people*, for they lost the knowledge and worship of him; no prophets were sent to them, no promises made to them, as were to the two tribes in their captivity; nay, they were no longer *a people*, but, for aught that appears, were mingled with the nations into which they were carried, and lost among them.

II. Of the reduction and restoration of Israel in the fullness of time. Here, as before, mercy is remembered in the midst of wrath; the rejection, as it shall not be total, so it shall not be final (v. 10, 11): *Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea*. See how the same hand that wounded is stretched forth to heal, and how tenderly he that has *torn binds up*; though God *cause grief* by his threatenings, yet *he will have compassion*, and will gather with everlasting kindness. They are very precious promises which are here made concerning the Israel of God, and which may be of use to us now.

1. Some think that these promises had their accomplishment in the return of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, when many of the ten tribes joined themselves to Judah, and took the benefit of the liberty which Cyrus proclaimed, came up in great numbers out of the several countries into which they were dispersed, to their own land, appointed Zerubbabel their head, and coalesced into one people, whereas before they had been two distinct nations. And in their own land, where God had by his prophets disowned and rejected them as none of his, he would by his prophets own them and appear for them as his children; and from all parts of the country they should come up to the temple to worship. And we have reason to think that, though this promise has a further reference, yet it was graciously intended and piously used for the support and comfort of the captives in Babylon, as giving them a general assurance of mercy which God had in store for them and their land; their nation could not be destroyed so long as this blessing was in it, was in reserve for it.

2. Some think that these promises will not have their accomplishment, at least not in full, till the general conversion of the Jews in the latter days, which is expected yet to come, when the vast incredible numbers of Jews, that are now dispersed as the sand of the sea, shall be brought to embrace the faith of Christ and be incorporated in the gospel-church. Then, and not till then, God will own them as his people, his children, even there where they had lain under the dismal tokens of their rejection. The Jewish doctors look upon this promise as not having had its accomplishment yet. But,

3. It is certain that this promise had its accomplishment in the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, by the preaching of the gospel, and the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles to it, for to these words are applied by St. Paul (Rom. ix. 25, 26), and by St. Peter when he writes to the Jews of the dispersion, 1 Pet. ii. 10. Israel here is the gospel-church, the spiritual Israel (Gal. vi. 16), all believers who follow the steps, and inherit the blessing of faithful Abraham, who is the father of all that believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, Rom. iv. 11, 12. Now let us see what is promised concerning this Israel.

(1.) That it shall greatly multiply, and the numbers of it be increased; it shall be *as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered*. Though Israel according to the flesh be diminished and made few, the spiritual Israel shall be numerous, shall be innumerable. In the vast multitudes that by the preaching of the gospel have been brought to Christ, both in the first ages of Christianity and ever since, this promise is fulfilled, thousands out of every tribe in Israel, and out of other nations, *a multitude which no man can number*, Rev. vii. 4, 9; Gal. iv. 27. In this the promise made to Abraham, when God called him Abraham the *high father of a multitude*, had its full accomplishment (Gen. xvii. 5), and that Gen. xxii. 17. Some observe that they are here compared to the *sand of the sea*, not only for their numbers, but as the sand of the sea serves for a boundary to the waters, that they shall not overflow the earth, so the Israelites indeed are a wall of defence to the places where they live, to keep off judgments. God can do nothing against Sodom while Lot is there.

(2.) That God will renew his covenant with the gospel-Israel, and will incorporate it a church to himself, by as full and ample a charter as that whereby the Old-Testament church was incorporated; nay, and its privileges shall be much greater: "*In the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people*, there shall you be again admitted into covenant, and owned as my people." The *abandoned Gentiles* in their respective places, and the *rejected Jews* in theirs, shall be favoured and blessed. There, where the fathers were cast off for their unbelief, the children, upon their believing, shall be taken in. This is a blessed resurrection, the making of those the people of God that were *not a people*. Nay, but the privilege is enlarged; now it is not only, *You are my people*, as formerly, but *You are the sons of the living God*, whether by birth you were Jews or Gentiles Israel under the law was *God's son, his first-born*, but then they were as children *under age*; now, under the gospel, they have grown up both to greater understanding and greater liberty, Gal. iv. 1, 2. Note, [1.] It is the unspeakable privilege of all believers that they have the living God for their Father, the ever-living God, and may look upon



themselves as his children by grace and adoption. [2.] The sonship of believers shall be owned and acknowledged; it shall be *said to them*, for their comfort and satisfaction, nay, and it shall be said for their honour in the hearing of the world, *You are the sons of the living God*. Let not the saints disquiet themselves; let not others despise them; for, sooner or later, there shall be a manifestation of the children of God, and all the world shall be made to know their excellency and the value God has for them. [3.] It will add much to their comfort, very much to their honour, when they are dignified with the tokens of God's favour in that very place where they had long lain under the tokens of his displeasure. This speaks comfort to the believing Gentiles, that they need not go up to Jerusalem, to be received and owned as God's children; no, they may stay where they are, and *in that place*, though it be in the remotest corner of the earth, *in that place* where they were at a distance, where it was said to them, *You are not God's people*, but are separated from them (Isa. lvi. 3, 6), even there, without leaving their country and kindred, they may by faith receive the *Spirit of adoption*, witnessing with their spirits that *they are the children of God*."

(3.) That those who had been at variance should be happily brought together (v. 11): *Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together*. This uniting of Judah and Israel, those two kingdoms that were now so much at variance, biting and devouring one another, is mentioned only as a specimen, or one instance, of the happy effect of the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the world, the bringing of those that had been at the greatest enmity one against another to a good understanding one of another and a good affection one to another. This was literally fulfilled when the Galileans, who inhabited that part of the country which belonged to the ten tribes, and probably for the most part descended from them, so heartily joined with those that were probably called *Jews* (that were of Judea) in following Christ and embracing his gospel; and his first disciples were partly Jews and partly Galileans. The first that were blessed with the light of the gospel were of the *land of Zebulun and Naphtali* (Matt. iv. 15); and, though there was no good-will at all between the Jews and the Galileans, yet, upon their believing in Christ, they were happily consolidated, and there were no remains of the former disaffection they had to one another; nay, when the Samaritans believed, though between them and the Jews there was a much greater enmity, yet in Christ there was a perfect unanimity, Acts viii. 14. Thus Judah and Israel were *gathered together*; yet this was but a type of the much more celebrated coalition between Jews and Gentiles, when, by the death of Christ, the partition-wall of the ce-

remonial law was taken down. See Eph. ii. 14—16. Christ died, to *gather together in one all the children of God that were scattered abroad*, John xi. 52; Eph. i. 10.

(4.) That Jesus Christ should be the centre of unity to all God's spiritual Israel. They shall all agree to *appoint to themselves one head*, which can be no other than he whom God has appointed, even Christ. Note, Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the one only head of it, not only a head of government, as of the body politic, but a head of vital influence, as of the natural body. To believe in Christ is to appoint him to ourselves for our head, that is, to consent to God's appointment, and willingly commit ourselves to his guidance and government; and this in concurrence and communion with all good Christians that make him their head; so that, though they are many, yet in him they are one, and so become one with each other. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt*—Those who agree with a third agree with each other.

(5.) That, having appointed Christ for their head, *they shall come up out of the land*; they shall come, some of all sorts, from all parts, to join themselves to the church, as, under the Jewish economy, they came up from all corners of the land of Israel to Jerusalem, to worship (Ps. cxvii. 4), *Thither the tribes go up*, to which there is a plain allusion in that prophecy of the accession of the Gentiles to the church (Isa. ii. 3), *Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord*. It denotes not a local remove (for they are said to be in the same place, v. 10), but a change of their mind, a spiritual ascent to Christ. They shall *come up from the earth* (so it may be read); for those who have given up themselves to Christ as their head take their affections off from *this earth*, and the things of it, to set them upon *things above* (Col. iii. 1, 2); for they are not of the world (John xv. 19), but have their conversation in heaven. They shall *come up out of the land*, though it be the land of their nativity; they shall, in affection, come out from it, that they may *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes*. Thus the learned Dr. Pocock takes it.

(6.) That, when all this comes to pass, *great shall be the day of Jezreel*. Though great is the day of Jezreel's affliction (so some understand it), yet *great shall be the day of Jezreel's glory*. This shall be Israel's day; the day shall be *their own*, after their enemies have long had their day. Israel is here called *Jezreel*, the *seed of God*, the *holy seed* (Isa. vi. 13), the *substance of the land*. This seed is now sown in the earth, and buried under the clods; but great shall be its day when the harvest comes. Great was the church's day when there were *added to it daily such as should be saved*; then did the Almighty do *great things* for it.

## CHAP. II.

The scope of this chapter seems to be much the same with that of the

foregoing chapter, and to point at the same events, and the causes of them. As there, so here, I. God, by the prophet, discovers sin to them, and charges it home upon them, the sin of their idolatry, their spiritual whoredom, their serving idols and forgetting God and their obligations to him, ver. 1, 2, 3, 8. II. He threatens to take away from them that plenty of all good things with which they had served their idols, and to abandon them to ruin without remedy, ver. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9—13. III. Yet he promises at last to return in ways of mercy to them for his own sake (ver. 14), to restore them to their former plenty (ver. 15), to cure them of their inclination to idolatry (ver. 16, 17), to renew his covenant with them (ver. 18—20), and to bless them with all good things, ver. 21—23.

**S**AY ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah. <sup>2</sup> Plead with your mother, plead: for she *is* not my wife, neither *am* I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; <sup>3</sup> Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. <sup>4</sup> And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they *be* the children of whoredoms. <sup>5</sup> For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

The first words of this chapter some make the close of the foregoing chapter, and add them to the promises which we have here of the great things God would do for them. When they shall have appointed Christ their head, and centered in him, then let them say to one another, with triumph and exultation (*let the prophets say it* to them, so the Chaldee—*Comfort you, comfort you, my people*, is now their commission), “say to them, *Ammi*, and *Ruhamah*; call them so again, for they shall no longer lie under the reproach and doom of *Lo-ammi* and *Lo-ruhamah*; they shall now be *my people* again, and shall obtain mercy.” God’s spiritual Israel, made up of Jews and Gentiles without distinction, shall call one another brethren and sisters, shall own one another for the people of God and beloved of him, and, for that reason, shall embrace one another, and stir up one another both to give thanks for and to walk worthy of this *common salvation* which they partake of. Or rather, because the following words seem to have a coherence with these, these also are designed for conviction and humiliation. The *mother* (v. 2) seems to be the same with the *brethren* and *sisters* (v. 1), the church of the ten tribes, the body of the people, who were brethren, and in a special manner with the heads and leaders, who were as the mother by whom the rest were brought up and nursed. But who are the children that must *plead with their mother* thus? Either, 1. The godly that were among

them, that witnessed against the iniquities of the times, let them boldly go on to bear their testimony against the idolatries and gross corruptions that prevail among them. Let those that had not bowed the knee to Baal reason the case with those that had, and endeavour to convince them with such arguments as are here put into their mouths. Note, Private persons may, and ought, in their places, to appear and plead against the public profanations of God’s name and worship. Children may humbly and modestly argue with their parents when they do amiss. *Plead with your mother, plead*, as Jonathan with Saul concerning David. Or, 2. The sufferers among them, that shared in the calamities of the times, let them not complain of God, let them not quarrel with him, nor lay the blame on him, as if he had dealt hardly with them, and not like a tender father. No; let them *plead with their mother*, and lay the fault on her, where it ought to be laid; compare Isa. 1. 1. “*For her transgressions is your mother put away*; she may thank herself, and you may thank her for all your miseries.” Let us see now how they must plead with her.

I. They must put her in mind of the relation wherein she had stood to God, the kindness he had had for her, the many favours he had bestowed upon her, and the further favours he had designed her. Let them tell their *brethren* and *sisters* that they had been *Ammi* and *Ruhamah*, that they had been God’s people and vessels of his mercy, and might have been so still if it had not been their own fault, v. 1. Note, Our relation to God and dependence on him are a great aggravation of our revolts from him and rebellions against him.

II. They must, in God’s name, charge her with the violation of the marriage-covenant between her and God. Let them tell her that God does not look upon her as his wife, nor upon himself as her husband any longer. Tell her (v. 2) that *she is not my wife, neither am I her husband*, that by her spiritual whoredom she has forfeited all the honour and comfort of her relation to God, and provoked him to give her a bill of divorce. Note, No consideration can be more powerful to awaken us to repentance than the provocation we have by sin given to God to disown and cast us off. It is time to look about us, and to think what course we must take, when God threatens to reject us; for woe unto us if he be not *our husband*. They must charge this home upon her (v. 5): *Their mother has played the harlot; their congregation has run a whoring after false prophets* (so the Chaldee), or, rather, *after idols*, wherein they were encouraged by their false prophets; *she that conceived them has done shamefully*, in making and worshipping idols. An idol is called a *shame* (ch. ix. 10) and idolatry is a *shameful thing*. It is not only an affront to God, but a reproach to men, to *fall down to*



the stock of a tree, as the prophet speaks. Or it denotes that the sinner was shameless, impudent in sin, and could not blush; Jer. vi. 15. Or, *She has made ashamed*, has made all that see her ashamed of her; her own children are ashamed of their relation to her.

III. They must upbraid her with her horrid ingratitude to God her benefactor, in ascribing to her idols the glory of the gifts he had given her, and then giving that for a reason why she paid them the homage due to him only, v. 5. In this she *did shamefully* indeed, that she said, *I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water*. Observe here, 1. Her wicked resolution to persist in idolatry, notwithstanding all that God said, both by his prophets and by his providences, to draw her from it. *She said*, Whatever is offered to the contrary, *I will go after my lovers, or those that cause me to love them*, whom I cannot but be in love with. The Chaldee understands it of the nations whose alliance Israel courted and depended upon, who supplied them with what they needed. But it is rather to be understood of the idols they worshipped, to justify their love of which they called them their lovers. See who do shamefully; those that are wilful and resolute in sin, and those that openly profess and own their resolution to go on in it. See the folly of idolaters, to call those their lovers that had not so much as life; yet let us learn to call our God our lover; let us keep up good thoughts of him, and put a high value upon our interest in him and in his love. 2. The gross mistake upon which this resolution was grounded: "I will go after my lovers, because they give me my bread and my water, which are necessary to sustain the body, my wool and my flax, which are necessary to clothe the body, and pleasant things, my oil, and my drink, my liquors" (so the word is), "wine and strong drink." Note, (1.) The things of sense are the best things with carnal hearts, and the most powerful attractives, in pursuit of which they care not what they follow after. The God of Israel set before them his statutes and judgments (Deut. iv. 8), *more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey* (Ps. cxix. 10), promised them his favour, which would *put gladness in their hearts more than corn, wine, and oil* (Ps. iv. 7); but they had no relish at all for these things. Whence they thought their oil and their drink came, thither they would return their best affections. *O curvæ in terram animæ et caelestium inanes!* — *O degenerate minds, bending towards the earth, and devoid of every thing heavenly!* (2.) It is a great abuse and injury to God, in pursuance of the pleasures and delights of sense to forsake him, who not only gives us better things, but gives us even those things too. The idolaters made Ceres the goddess of their corn, Bacchus the god of their wine, &c., and then foolishly fancied they had their corn and wine from these,

forgetting the Lord their God, who both gave them that good land and gave them power to get wealth out of it. (3.) Many are hardened in sin by their worldly prosperity. They had an abundance of those things when they served their idols, and then imagined them to be given them by their idols, which kept them to their service; thus they argued (Jer. xlv. 17, 18), *While we burnt incense to the queen of heaven we had plenty of victuals*.

IV. They must persuade her to repent and reform. God will disown her if she persist in her whoredoms; *let her therefore put away her whoredoms, v. 2*. Let her be convinced that it is possible for her to reform; the idols, dear as they are, may yet be parted with; and it will certainly be well with her if she do reform. Note, Our pleading with sinners must be to drive them to repentance, not to drive them to despair. Let her *put away her whoredoms and her adulteries*; the doubling of words to the same purport, and both plural, denotes the abundance of idolatries they were guilty of, all which must be abandoned ere God would be reconciled to them. Let her put them *out of her sight*, as detestable things which she cannot endure to look upon; let her say unto them, *Get you hence*, Isa. xxx. 22. Let her put them *from her face and from between her breasts*, that is, let her not do as harlots use to do, that both discover their own wicked disposition, and allure others to wickedness, by painting their faces, and exposing their naked breasts, and adorning them; let her not thus, by annexing all possible gaieties and pleasures to the worship of idols, engage herself and allure others to it. Let her put away all these. Every sinful course, persisted in, is an adulterous departure from God. And here we may see what it is truly to repent of it and turn from it. 1. True penitents will forsake both open sins and secret sins, will put away not only the whoredoms that lie in sight, but those that lie in secret *between their breasts*, the sin that is *rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel*. 2. They will both avoid the outward occasions of sin and mortify the inward disposition to it. Idolaters walked after their own eyes, which *went a whoring* after their idols (Ezek. vi. 9, Deut. iv. 19), and therefore they must put them away *out of their sight*, lest they should be tempted to worship them. *Look not upon the wine when it is red*. But that is not enough. the axe must be *laid to the root*; the corrupt bent and inclination of the heart must be changed, and it must be put away *from between the breasts*, that Christ alone may have the innermost and uppermost place there. Cant. i. 13.

V. They must show her the utter ruin that will certainly be the fatal consequence of her sin if she do not repent and reform (v. 3): *Lest I strip her naked*. This comes in here not by way of sentence passed upon

her, but by way of warning given to her, that she may prevent it: *Let her put away her whoredoms, that I may not strip her naked* (so it may be read), intimating that God waits to show mercy to sinners, if they would but qualify themselves for that mercy. It is here threatened that God will deal with her as the just and jealous husband at length does with an adulterous wife, that has filled his house with a spurious brood, and will not be reclaimed; he turns her and her children out of doors and sends them a begging; *I will not have mercy upon her children* (v. 4); the particular persons that share in the calamity of the nation, and the rising generation, shall be ruined by it, for they are *children of whoredoms*, and keep up the *vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers*. Now it is here threatened that they shall be both stripped and starved. They thought their idols gave them *their bread and their water, their wool and their flax*; but God, by taking them away, will let them know that it was he that gave them. 1. She shall be stripped: *Lest I strip her* of all her ornaments which she is proud of, and with which she courts her lovers, *strip her* and set her *as in the day that she was born*, send her as naked out of the world as she came into it; this death does, Job i. 21. *I will strip her*, and so expose her to cold, and expose her to shame; and justly is she exposed to shame that *did shamefully*, v. 5. The day when God brought them out of Egypt, where they were no better than slaves and beggars, *was the day in which they were born*; and God threatens to bring them back to as low and miserable a condition as he then found them in. Whatever they had that either gained them respect or screened them from contempt, among their neighbours, should be taken from them. See Ezek. xvi. 4, 39. 2. She shall be starved, shall be deprived not only of her honours, but of her comforts and necessary supports. She shall be famished, shall be made *as a wilderness and a dry land, and slain with thirst*. She that boasted so much of her bread and water, her oil and her drinks, which her lovers had *given her*, shall not have so much as necessary food. The land shall not afford subsistence for the inhabitants, for want of the rain of heaven; or, if it do, it shall be taken from them by the enemy, so that the rightful owners shall perish for want of it. Some understand it thus: *I will make her as she was in the wilderness*, and set her as she was *in the desert land*, where she was sometimes ready to perish *for thirst*. So it explains the former part of the verse: I will set her *as in the day that she was born*; for it was in the vast howling wilderness that Israel was first formed into a people. They shall be in as deplorable a condition as their fathers were, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, and in this respect, worse, that then the

children were reserved to be heirs of the land of promise, but now *I will not have mercy upon her children, for their mother has played the harlot*.

6 Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. 7 And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then *was it* better with me than now. 8 For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, *which* they prepared for Baal. 9 Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax *given* to cover her nakedness. 10 And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. 11 I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feasts, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. 12 And I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, whereof she hath said, *These are my rewards that my lovers have given me*: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. 13 And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.

God here goes on to threaten what he would do with this treacherous idolatrous people; and he warns that he may not wound, he threatens that he may not strike. *If he turn not, he will whet his sword* (Ps. vii. 12); but, if he turn, he will sheathe it. They did not turn, and therefore all this came upon them: and its being threatened before shows that it was the execution of a divine sentence upon them for their wickedness; and it is written for admonition to us.

1. They shall be perplexed and embarrassed in all their counsels, and disappointed in all their expectations. This is threatened v. 6, 7. But to the threatening is annexed a promise that this shall be a means to convince them of their folly, and bring them home to their duty; and so good shall be brought out of evil, in token of the mercy God has yet in reserve for them. And, this



being the happy fruit and effect of the distress, it is hard to say whether the prediction, or the distress itself, should be called a threatening or a promise.

1. God will raise up difficulties and troubles in their way, so that their public counsels and affairs shall have no success, nor shall they be able to get forward in them: *I will hedge up thy way with thorns*, with such crosses as, like thorns and briars, are the product of sin and the curse, and are scratching, and tearing, and vexing, and, when the way we are in is hedged up with them, stop our progress, and force us to turn back. She said, "*I will go after my lovers; I will pursue my leagues and alliances with foreign powers, and depend upon them.*" But God says, "She shall be frustrated in these projects, and not be able to proceed in them. *I will hedge up thy way with thorns*, and, if that do not serve, *I will make a wall.*" If some smaller difficulties be got over, and prevail not to break her measures, God will raise greater, for he will overcome when he judges. It shall be such a hedge, and such a wall, that *she shall not find her paths*. The change of the person here, *I will hedge up thy way*, and then, *She shall not find it*, is usual in scripture, especially in an earnest way of speaking. "Sinner, do thou take notice, *I will hedge up thy way*, and all you that are by-standers take notice what will be the effect of this, you may observe that *she cannot find her paths.*" She shall be as a traveller that not only knows not which way to go, of many that are before him, but that finds no way at all to go forward. And then *she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them*; she shall endeavour to make an interest in the Assyrians and Egyptians, and to have them for her protectors, but she shall not gain her point; they shall either not come into confederacy with her or not do her any service, shall *help in vain* and be as the *staff of a broken reed*. *She shall seek them, but shall not find them*, shall seek to her idols, but shall not find that satisfaction in them which she promised herself; the gods whom she trusted and courted not only can do nothing for her, but have nothing to say to her to encourage her. Now, (1.) This is such a just judgment as the Sodomites met with, that were *struck with blindness, and wearied themselves to find the door* (Gen. xix. 11), and the Syrians, 2 Kings vi. 18. Note, Those that are most resolute in their sinful pursuits are commonly most crossed in them. *Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward* (Prov. xxii. 5); and thus with them God shows himself froward (Ps. xviii. 26), and walks contrary to those that walk contrary to him, Lev. xxvi. 23, 24. The lamenting prophet complains, *He has enclosed my ways*, Lam. iii. 7, 9. The way of God and duty is often hedged about with thorns, but we have

reason to think it is a sinful way that is hedged up with thorns. (2.) This is such a kind rebuke, and indeed such a mercy, as Balaam met with, when the angel stood in his way, to hinder his going forward to *curse Israel*, Num. xxii. 22. Note, Crosses and obstacles in an evil course are great blessings, and are so to be accounted. They are God's hedges, to keep us from transgressing, to restrain us from wandering out of the green pastures, to *withdraw man from his purpose* (Job xxxiii. 17), to make the way of sin difficult, that we may not go on in it, and to keep us from it whether we will or not. We have reason to bless God both for restraining grace and for restraining providences.

2. These difficulties that God raises up in their way shall raise up in their minds thoughts of turning back: "*Then shall she say*, Since I cannot overtake my lovers, *I will even go and return to my first husband*, that is, will return to God, and humble myself to him, and desire him to take me in again; for, when I kept close to him, it was every way *better with me than now.*" Two things are here extorted from this degenerate apostate people:—(1.) A just acknowledgment of the folly of their apostasy. They are now brought to own that it was better with them while they kept close to their God than ever it was since they forsook him. Note, Whoever have exchanged the service of God for the service of the world and the flesh have, sooner or later, been made to own that they *changed for the worse*, and that while they continued in good company, and went on in the way of good duties, and made conscience how they spent their time and what they said or did, it was better with them; they had more true comfort and enjoyment of themselves than ever they had since they went astray. (2.) A good purpose, to come back again to their duty: *I will go, and return to my first husband*; and she knows so much of his goodness and readiness to forgive that she speaks without any doubt of his receiving her again into favour and making her condition as good as ever. Note, The disappointments we meet with in our pursuits of satisfaction in the creature should, if nothing else will do it, drive us at length to the Creator, in whom alone it is to be had. When Moab is *wearied of the high place* he shall go to the *sanctuary*, Isa. xvi. 12. And when the prodigal son is reduced to husks, short allowance indeed, and remembers that in his father's house there is bread enough, then he says, *I will arise and go to my father's house*, Luke xv. 17, 18.

II. The necessary supports and comforts of life shall be taken from them, because they had dishonoured God with them, v. 8, 9. Their land was plenteous. Now see here,

1. How graciously their plenty was given to them. God gave them not only corn for

necessity, but wine for delight, and oil for ornament. Nay, he *multiplied their silver and gold*, wherewith to traffic with other nations and bring home their products, and which they might hoard up for posterity. *Silver and gold* will keep longer than *corn, and wine, and oil*. He gave them *wool* and *flax* too, to cover their nakedness, and to serve for ornament enough to them, Ezek. xvi. 10. Note, God is a bountiful benefactor even to those who, he foresees, will be ungrateful and unthankful to him.

2. How basely their plenty was abused by them. (1.) They robbed God of the honour of his gifts: *She did not know that I gave her corn and wine*; she did not remember it. The law and the prophets had told them, again and again, that all their comforts they received from God's bountiful providence; but they were so often told by their false prophets and idolatrous priests that they had their corn from such an idol, and their wine from such an idol, &c., that they had quite forgotten their relation to their great benefactor and their obligations to him. She did not consider it; she would not acknowledge it. This they were *willingly ignorant of*, and more brutish than the ox, that *knows his owner*, and the ass, that *knows his master's crib*. *She did not know it*, for she did not return thanks to him for his gifts, nor study what she should render; nor did she give him his dues out of them, but acted as if she were ignorant who was the donor. (2.) They served and honoured his enemies with them: *They prepared them for Baal*; they adorned their images with *gold and silver* (Jer. x. 4), and adorned themselves for the worship of their images, v. 13. See Ezek. xvi. 17—19: *Wherewith they made Baal* (so the margin reads it), that is, the image of Baal. Note, It is a very great dishonour to the God of heaven to make those gifts of his providence the food and fuel of our lusts which he gave us for our support in his service, and to be oil to the wheels of our obedience.

3. How justly their plenty should be taken from them: "*Therefore will I return*; I will alter my dealings with them, will take another course, and *will take away my corn and other good things that I gave her*." I will *recover* them, a law term, as a man by due course of law recovers what is unjustly detained from him, or as, when the tenant has committed waste, the landlord recovers *locum vastatum*—*dilapidations*. Observe, God calls their abundance *my corn and my wine, my wool and my flax*. They called it theirs (*my bread and my water*, v. 5), but God lets them know that it is not theirs; he only allowed them the use of it as tenants, entrusted them with the management of it as stewards, but still reserved the property in himself. "It is *my corn and my wine*." God will have us to know, not only that we have all our creature-comforts and enjoyments from him,

but that he has still an incontestable right and title to them, that they are more his than ours, and therefore are to be used for him, and accounted for to him. He will therefore take their plenty away from them, because they have forfeited it by disowning his right, as a tenant by copy of court-roll, who holds at the will of his lord, forfeits his estate if he makes a feoffment of it as though he were a freeholder. He will *recover* it, will *free or deliver* it, that it may be no longer abused, as the creature is said to be *delivered from the bondage of corruption* under which it groans, Rom. viii. 21. He will take it away *in the time thereof*, and *in the season thereof*, just when they expected it, and thought that they were sure of it. It shall suffer shipwreck in the harbour; and *the harvest shall be a heap*. He will take it away by unseasonable weather or by unreasonable men. Note, Those that abuse the mercies God gives them, to his dishonour, cannot expect to enjoy them long.

III. They shall lose *all their honour*, and be exposed to contempt (v. 10): "*I will discover her lewdness*, will bring to light all her secret wickedness, and make it public, to her shame; I will show by the punishment of it how heinous, how odious, how offensive it is. The fact has been denied, but now it shall appear; the fault has been diminished, but now it shall appear exceedingly sinful. And this *in the sight of her lovers*, in the sight of the neighbouring nations, with whom she courted an alliance, and on whom she had a dependence; they shall despise her and be ashamed of her because of her weakness, and poverty, and ill conduct; they shall not think her any longer worthy of their friendship." See this fulfilled, Lam. i. 8, *All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness*. Or in the sight of the sun and moon, which she worshipped as her lovers; before them shall her *lewdness be discovered*. Compare this with Jer. viii. 1, 2, *They shall bring out the bones of their kings and princes, and spread them before the sun and moon, whom they have loved and served*. Note, Sin will have shame; let those expect it that have done shamefully. What other lot can this impudent adulteress expect but that of a common harlot, to be carted through the town? And, when God comes to deal thus with her, *none shall deliver her out of his hands*, neither the gods nor the men they confide in. Note, Those who will not deliver themselves into the hand of God's mercy cannot be delivered out of the hand of his justice.

IV. They shall lose all their pleasure, and shall be left melancholy (v. 11): "*I will cause her mirth to cease*. It seems, then, though they had *gone a whoring from their God*, yet they could find in their hearts to rejoice as other people, which is forbidden, ch. ix. 1. Note, Many who lie under guilt and wrath are yet very jocund and merry, and live jo-



vially; but, whether in their laughter their hearts be sad or no, it is certain that the *end of their mirth will be heaviness*; for God will cause all their mirth to cease. It is as Mr. Burroughs observes here, *Sin and mirth can never hold long together*; but, *if men will not take away sin from their mirth, God will take away mirth from their sin*.

1. God will take away the occasions of their sacred mirth—their *feast-days, their new moons, their sabbaths, and all their solemn feasts*. These God instituted to be observed in a religious manner, and they were to be observed with rejoicing; and, it seems, though they had departed from the pure worship of God, yet they kept up the observance of these, not at God's temple at Jerusalem, for they had long since forsaken that, but probably at Dan and Bethel, where the calves were, or in some other places of meeting that they had. They observed them, not for the honour of God, nor with any true devotion towards him, but only because they were times of mirth and feasting, music and dancing, and meeting of friends, received by tradition from their fathers. Thus, when they had lost the power of godliness, and denied that, yet, for the pleasing of a vain and carnal mind, they kept up the form of it; and by this means their new-moons and their sabbaths became an iniquity which God could not away with, Isa. i. 13. Now observe, (1.) God calls them their new-moons and their sabbaths, not his (he disowns them), but theirs. (2.) He will cause them to cease. Note, When men by their sins have caused the life and substance of ordinances to cease it is just with God by his judgments to cause the remaining show and shadow of them to cease.

2. He will take away the supports of their carnal mirth. They loved the new-moons and the sabbaths only for the sake of the good cheer that was stirring then, not for the sake of any religious exercises then performed; these they had dropped long ago; and now God will take away their provisions for these solemnities (v. 12): *I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees*. Note, If men destroy God's words and ordinances, by which he should be honoured on their feast-days, it is just with him to destroy their vines and fig-trees, with which they regale themselves. While they took the pleasure of these, they gave their lovers the praise of them: *"These are my rewards which my lovers have given me*; I may thank my stars for these, and my worship of them; I may thank my neighbours for these, and my alliance with them."

And therefore God will destroy them, will wither them with a blast, or bring in a foreign enemy that shall lay the country waste, so that their vineyards shall become a *forest*; the enclosures shall be thrown down, as is usual in war; all shall be laid in common, so that the *beasts of the field* shall eat their grapes and their

figs. Or they shall be so blasted with the east wind that fruit-trees shall be of no more use than forest-trees; but, being withered and good for nothing, what fruit there is shall be left to the *beasts of the field*. Or it shall be devoured by their enemies, by men as barbarous as wild beasts. Now, (1.) This shall be the ruin of their mirth: God will cause all her mirth to cease. How will he do it? Taking away the new-moons and the sabbaths will not do it; they can very easily part with them, and find no loss; but *"I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees, will take away her sensual pleasures, and then she will think herself undone indeed."* Note, The destruction of the vines and the fig-trees causes all the mirth of a carnal heart to cease; it will say, as Micah, *You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* (2.) This shall be the punishment of her idolatry (v. 13): *"I will visit upon her the days of Baalim*; I will reckon with her for all the worship of all the Baals they have made gods of, from the days of their fathers unto this day."

We read of their worshipping Baal as long ago as the time of the Judges, and, for aught I know, this may look as far back as those times, those *days of Baalim*; for it is in the second commandment, which forbids idolatry, that God threatens to *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*; and justly is that sin so visited, more than any other, because it commonly supports itself by prescription and long usage. Now that the measure of the iniquity of Israel was full all their former sins came into the account, and shall be *required of this generation*. Or the *days of Baalim* are the solemn festival days which they kept in honour of their idols. Days of sinful mirth must be visited in days of mourning. These were the days wherein she *burnt incense to idols*, and, to grace the solemnity, *decked herself with her ear-rings and her jewels*, that, appearing honourable, the honour she did to Baal might be thought the greater. Or she was as a wife that decks herself with the ear-rings and jewels that her husband gave her, to make herself amiable to her lovers, whom she follows after, and is ever mindful of. But *she forgot me, saith the Lord*. Note, Our treacherous departures from God are owing to our forgetfulness of him, of his nature and attributes, his relation to us and our obligations to him. Many who plead that they have weak memories, and forget the things of God, can remember other things well enough; nay, it is because they are so mindful of lying vanities that they are so forgetful of their own mercies.

14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.  
15 And I will give her her vineyards

from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. 16 And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, *that* thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. 17 For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. 18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and *with* the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. 19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. 20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD. 21 And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; 22 And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel. 23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to *them which were* not my people, *Thou art* my people; and they shall say, *Thou art* my God.

The state of Israel ruined by their own sin did not look so black and dismal in the former part of the chapter, but that the state of Israel, restrained by the divine grace, looks as bright and pleasant here in the latter part of the chapter, and the more surprisingly so as the promises follow thus close upon the threatenings; nay, which is very strange, they are by a note of connexion joined to, and inferred from, that declaration of their sinfulness upon which the threatenings of their ruin are grounded: *She went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord; therefore I will allure her.* Fitly therefore is that *therefore* which is the note of connexion immediately followed with a note of admiration: *Behold I will allure her!* When it was said, *She forgot me, one* would think it should have followed, "Therefore I will abandon her, I will forget her, I will never look after her more." No, *There-*

*fore I will allure her.* Note, God's thoughts and ways of mercy are infinitely above ours; his reasons are all fetched from within himself, and not from any thing in us; nay, his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious, Isa. lvii. 17, 18. *Therefore*, because she will not be restrained by the denunciations of wrath, God will try whether she will be wrought upon by the offers of mercy. Some think it may be translated, *Afterwards, or nevertheless, I will allure her.* It comes all to one; the design is plainly to magnify free grace to those on whom God will have mercy purely for mercy's sake. Now that which is here promised to Israel is,

I. That though now they were disconsolate, and ready to despair, they should again be revived with comforts and hopes, v. 14, 15. This is expressed here with an allusion to God's dealings with that people when he brought them out of Egypt, through the wilderness to Canaan, as their forlorn and deplorable condition in their captivity was compared to their state in *Egypt in the day that they were born*, v. 3. They shall be new-formed by such miracles of love and mercy as they were first-formed by, and such a transport of joy shall they be in as they were in then. It is hard to say when this had its accomplishment in the kingdom of the ten tribes; but it principally aims, no doubt, at the bringing in both of Jews and Gentiles into the church by the gospel of Christ; and it is applicable, nay, we have reason to think it was designed that it should be applied, to the conversion of particular souls to God. Now observe,

1. The gracious methods God will take with them. (1.) He will *bring them into the wilderness*, as he did at first when he brought them out of Egypt, where he instructed them, and took them into covenant with himself. The land of their captivity shall be to them now, as that wilderness was then, the *furnace of affliction*, in which God will *choose them*. See Ezek. xx. 35, 36, *I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you.* God had said that he would *make them as a wilderness* (v. 3), which was a threatening; now, when it is here made part of a promise that he would bring them into the wilderness, the meaning may be that he would by his grace bring their minds to their condition: "They shall have humble hearts under humbling providences; being poor, they shall be poor in spirit, shall *accept of the punishment of their iniquity*, and then they are prepared to have comfort spoken to them." When God delivered Israel out of Egypt he led them into the wilderness, to *humble them and prove them, that he might do them good* (Deut. viii. 2, 3, 15, 16), and so he will do again. Note, Those whom God has mercy in store for he first *brings into a wilderness*—into solitude and retirement,



that they may the more freely converse with him out of the noise of this world,—into distress of mind, through sense of guilt and dread of wrath, which brings a soul to be quite at a loss in itself and bewildered, and by those convictions he prepares for consolations,—and sometimes into outward distress and trouble, thereby to open the ear to discipline. (2.) He will then *allure them and speak comfortably to them*, will *persuade them and speak to their hearts*, that is, he will by his word and Spirit incline their hearts to return to him, and encourage them to do so. He will allure them with the promises of his favour, as before he had terrified them with the threatenings of his wrath, will speak friendly to them, both by his prophets and by his providences, as before he had spoken roughly, Isa. xl. 1, 2. *By the hand of my servants the prophets I will speak comfort to her heart*; so the Chaldee. This refers to the gospel of Christ, and the offers of divine grace in the gospel, by which we are allured to forsake our sins and to turn to God, and which speaks to the heart of a convinced sinner that which is every way suited to his case, speaks abundant consolation to those that sorrow for sin and lament after the Lord. And when by the Spirit it is indeed spoken to the heart effectually, and so as to reach the conscience (which it is God's prerogative to do), O what a blessed change is wrought by it! Note, The best way of reducing wandering souls to God is by fair means. By the promise of rest in Christ we are invited to take his yoke upon us; and the work of conversion may be forwarded by comforts as well as by convictions. (3.) *He will give her her vineyards thence*. From that time and from that place where he has afflicted her, and brought her to see her folly and to humble herself, thenceforward he will *do her good*; not only speak comfortably to her, but do well for her, and undo what he had done against her. He had *destroyed her vines* (v. 12), but now he will give her whole *vineyards*, as if for every vine destroyed she should have a vineyard restored, and so be repaid with interest; she shall not only have corn for necessity, but vineyards for delight. These denote the privileges and comforts of the gospel, which are prepared for those that *come up out of the wilderness leaning upon Christ as their beloved*, Cant. viii. 5. Note, God has vineyards of consolation ready to bestow on those who repent and return to him; and he can give vineyards *out of a wilderness*, which are of all others the most welcome, as rest to the weary (4.) He will give her *the valley of Achor for a door of hope*. The valley of Achor was that in which Achan was stoned; it signifies *the valley of trouble*, because he troubled Israel, and there God troubled him. This was the beginning of the wars of Canaan; and their putting away the accursed thing in that place gave them

ground to hope that God would continue his presence with them and complete their victories. So when God returns to his people in mercy, and they to him in duty, it will be to them as happy an omen as any thing. If they put away the accursed thing from among them, if by mortifying sin they stone the Achan that has troubled their camp, their subduing that enemy within themselves is an earnest to them of victory over all the kings of Canaan. Or, if the allusion be to the name, it intimates that trouble for sin, if it be sincere, opens a door of hope; for that sin which truly troubles us shall not ruin us. The valley of Achor was a very fruitful pleasant valley, some think the same with the valley of Engedi, famous for vineyards, Cant. i. 14. This God gave to Israel as a pattern and pledge of the whole land of Canaan; so "God will by his gospel give to all believers such gifts, graces, and comforts in this life, as shall be a taste of those more perfect good things of the kingdom of heaven, and shall give them an assured hope of a full possession of them in due time." So the learned Dr. Pocock expounds it; and, to the same purport, this whole context.

2. The great rejoicing with which they shall receive God's gracious returns towards them: *She shall sing there as in the days of her youth*. This plainly refers to that triumphant and prophetic song which Moses and the children of Israel sang at the Red Sea, Exod. xv. 1. When they are delivered out of captivity they shall repeat that song, and to them it shall be a new song, because sung upon a new occasion, not inferior to the former. God had said (v. 11) that he would *cause all her mirth to cease*, but now he would cause it to revive: *She shall sing as in the day that she came out of Egypt*. Note, When God repeats former mercies we must repeat former praises; we find the song of Moses sung in the New Testament, Rev. xv. 3. This promise of Israel's singing has its accomplishment in the gospel of Christ, which furnishes us with abundant matter for joy and praise, and wherever it is received in its power enlarges the heart in joy and praise; and this is that land flowing with milk and honey which *the valley of Achor opens a door of hope to*. We rejoice in tribulation.

II. That, though they had been much addicted to the worship of Baal, they should now be perfectly weaned from it, should relinquish and abandon all appearances of idolatry and approaches towards it, and cleave to God only, and worship him as he appoints. v. 16, 17. Note, The surest pledge and token of God's favour to any people is his effectual parting between them and their beloved sins. The worship of Baal was the sin that did most easily beset the people of Israel; it was their own iniquity, the sin that had dominion over them; but now that

idolatry shall be quite abolished, and there shall not be the least remains of it among them. 1. The idols of Baal shall not be mentioned, not any of the Baals that in the days of Baalim had made so great a noise with, *O Baal! hear us; O Baal! hear us.* The very names of Baalim shall be taken out of their mouths; they shall be so disused that they shall be quite forgotten, as if their names had never been known in Israel; they shall be so detested that people will not bear to mention them themselves, nor to hear others mention them, so that posterity shall scarcely know that ever there were such things. They shall be so ashamed of their former love to Baal that they shall do all they can to blot out the remembrance of it. They shall tie themselves up to the strictest literal meaning of that law against idolatry (Exod. xxiii. 13), *Make no mention of the names of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth,* as David, Ps. xvi. 4. Thus the apostle expresses the abhorrence we ought to have of all fleshly lusts: *Let them not be once named among you,* Eph. v. 3. But how can such a change of the Ethiopian's skin be wrought? It is answered, The power of God can do it, and will. *I will take away the names of Baalim;* as Zech. xiii. 2, *I will cut off the names of the idols.* Note, God's grace in the heart will change the language by making that iniquity to be loathed which was beloved. Zeph. iii. 9, *I will turn to the people a pure language.* One of the rabbins says, This promise relates to the Gentiles as well as to Israel; and we know it had its accomplishment in the turning of the Gentiles, by the gospel of Christ, from the idolatries which they had been wedded to, 1 Thess. i. 9. 2. The very word Baal shall be laid aside, even in its innocent signification. God says, *Thou shalt call me Ishi, and call me no more Baali;* both signify *my husband*, and both had been made use of concerning God. Isa. liv. 5, *Thy Maker is thy husband, thy Baal* (so the word is), thy owner, patron, and protector. It is probable that many good people had, accordingly, made use of the word *Baali* in worshipping the God of Israel; when their wicked neighbours bowed the knee to Baal they gloried in this, that God was their Baal. "But," says God, "you shall call me so no more, because I will have the very names of Baalim taken away." Note, That which is very innocent in itself should, when it has been abused to idolatry, be abolished, and the very use of it taken away, that nothing may be done to keep idols in remembrance, much less to keep them in reputation. When calling God *Ishi* will do as well, and signify as much, as *Baali*, let that word be chosen rather, lest, by calling him *Baali*, others should be put in mind of their *quondam* Baals. Some think that there is another reason intimated why God would be called *Ishi* and not *Baali*; they both signify *my husband*, but *Ishi* is a compellation of love,

and sweetness, and familiarity, *Baali* of reverence and subjection. *Ishi* is *cir meus—my man*; *Baali* is *dominus meus—my lord*. In gospel-times God has so revealed himself to us as to encourage us to come boldly to the throne of his grace, and to use a holy humble freedom there; we ought to call God our Master, for so he is, but we are more taught to call him our Father. *Ishi* is *a man the Lord* (Gen. iv. 1), and intimates that in gospel-times the church's husband shall be *the man Christ Jesus*, made like unto his brethren, and therefore they shall call him *Ishi*, not *Baali*.

III. That though they had been in continual troubles, as if the whole creation had been at war with them, now they shall enjoy perfect peace and tranquillity, as if they were in a league of friendship with the whole creation (v. 18): *In that day, when they have forsaken their idols, and put themselves under the divine protection, I will make a covenant for them.* 1. They shall be protected from evil; nothing shall hurt them, nor do them any mischief. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia—When God is at peace with us he makes every creature to be so too.* The inferior creatures shall do them no harm, as they had done when the *beasts of the field* ate up their vineyards (v. 12) and when *noisome beasts* were one of God's *sore judgments*, Ezek. xiv. 15. The *fowl* and the *creeping things* are taken into this covenant; for they also, when God makes use of them as the instruments of his justice, may become very hurtful, but they shall be no more so; nay, by virtue of this covenant, they shall be made serviceable to them and brought into their interests. Note, God has the command of the inferior creatures, and brings them into what covenant he pleases; he can make *the beasts of the field* to honour him (so he has promised, Isa. xliii. 20) and to contribute to his people's comfort. And, if the inferior creatures are thus laid under an engagement to serve us, it is our part of the covenant not to abuse them, but to serve God with them. Some think that this had its accomplishment in the miraculous power Christ gave his disciples to *take up serpents*, Mark xvi. 17, 18. It agrees with the promises made particularly to Israel, in their return out of captivity (Ezek. xxxiv. 25, *I will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land*), and the more general ones to all the saints. Job v. 22, 23, *The beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee;* and Ps. xci. 13, *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder.* But this is not all; men are more in danger from one another than from the brute beast, and therefore it is further promised that God will *make wars to cease*, will disarm the enemy: *I will break the bow, and sword, and battle.* He can do it when he pleases (Ps. xlvii. 9), and will do it for those whose *ways please him*, for he *makes even their enemies to be at peace with them*, Prov. xvi. 7. This



agrees with the promise that in gospel-times *swords shall be beaten into plough-shares*, Isa. ii. 4. 2. They shall be quiet from the fear of evil. God will not only keep them safe, but *make them to lie down safely*, as those that know themselves to be under the protection of Heaven, and therefore are not afraid of the powers of hell.

IV. That, though God had given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms, yet, upon their repentance, he would again take them into covenant with himself, into a marriage-covenant, v. 19, 20. God's making a covenant for them with the inferior creatures was a great favour; but it was nothing to this, that he took them into covenant with himself and engaged himself to do them good. Observe,

1. The nature of this covenant; it is a *marriage-covenant*, founded in choice and love, and founding the nearest relation: *I will betroth thee unto me*; and again, and a third time, *I will betroth thee*. Note, All that are sincerely devoted to God are betrothed to him; God gives them the most sacred and inviolable security imaginable that he will love them, protect them, and provide for them, that he will do the part of a husband to them, and that he will incline their hearts to join themselves to him and will graciously accept of them in so doing. Believing souls are espoused to Christ, 2 Cor. xi. 2. The gospel-church is *the bride, the Lamb's wife*; and they would never come into that relation to him if he did not by the power of his grace betroth them to himself. The separation begins on our side; we alienate ourselves from God. The coalition begins on his side; he betroths us to himself.

2. The duration of this covenant: "*I will betroth thee for ever*." The covenant itself shall be inviolable; God will not break it on his part, and you shall not on yours; and the blessings of it shall be everlasting." One of the Jewish rabbins says, 'This is a promise that *she shall attain to the life of the world to come, which is absolute eternity or perpetuity*.'

3. The manner in which this covenant shall be made. (1.) In *righteousness and judgment*, that is, God will deal sincerely and uprightly in covenant with them; they have broken covenant, and God is righteous. "But," says God, "I will renew the covenant in *righteousness*." The matter shall be so ordered that God may receive even these backsliding children into his family again, without any reflection upon his justice, nay, his justice being satisfied by the Mediator of this covenant, very much to the honour of it. But what reason can there be why God should take a people into covenant with him that had so often dealt treacherously? Will it not reflect upon his wisdom? "No," says God; "I will do it in *judgment*, not rashly, but upon due consideration; let me alone to give a reason for it and to justify my own con-

duct." (2.) In *lovingkindness and in mercies*. God will deal tenderly and graciously in covenanting with them; and will be not only as good as his word, but better; and, as he will be just in keeping covenant with them, so he will be merciful in keeping them in the covenant. They are subject to many infirmities, and, if he be extreme to mark what they do amiss, they will soon lose the benefit of the covenant. He therefore promises that it shall be a covenant of grace, made in a compassionate consideration of their infirmities, so that every transgression in the covenant shall not throw them out of covenant; he will *gather with everlasting lovingkindness*. (3.) In *faithfulness*. Every article of the covenant shall be punctually performed. *Faithful is he that has called them, who also will do it*; he cannot deny himself.

4. The means by which they shall be kept tight and faithful to the covenant on their part: *Thou shalt know the Lord*. This is not only a promise that God will reveal himself to them more fully and clearly than ever, but that he will give them a *heart to know him*; they shall know more of him, and shall know him in another manner than ever yet. The ground of their apostasy was their not knowing God to be their benefactor (v. 8); therefore, to prevent the like, they shall all be *taught of God* to know him. Note, God keeps up his interest in men's souls by giving them a good understanding and a right knowledge of things, Heb. viii. 11.

V. That, though the heavens had been to them as brass, and the earth as iron, now the heavens shall yield their dews, and by that means the earth its fruits, v. 21, 22. God having betrothed the gospel-church and in it all believers to himself, how shall he not with himself and with his Son freely give them *all things*, all things pertaining both to life and godliness, all things they need or can desire? *All is theirs*, for they are *Christ's*, betrothed to him; and with the righteousness of the kingdom of God, which they seek first, *all other things* shall be added unto them. And yet this promise of *corn and wine* is to be taken also in a spiritual sense (so the learned Dr. Pocock thinks): it is an effusion of those blessings and graces which relate to the soul that is here promised under the metaphor of temporal blessings, the dew of heaven, as well as the fatness of the earth, and that put first, as in the blessing of Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 28. God had threatened (v. 9) that he would take away the *corn and the wine*; but now he promises to restore them, and that in the common course and order of nature. While they lay under the judgment of famine they called to the earth for *corn and wine* for the support of themselves and their families. Very gladly would the earth have supplied them, but she cannot give unless she receive, cannot produce *corn and wine* unless she be *enriched with the river of God* (Ps. lxxv. 9); and therefore she calls to

the heavens for rain, the former and latter rain in their season, gapes for it, and by her melancholy aspect when rain is denied pleads for it. "But," say the heavens, "we have no rain to give unless he who has the key of the clouds unlock them, and open these bottles; so that, *if the Lord do not help you, we cannot.*" But, when God takes them into covenant with himself, then the wheel of nature shall be set a-going again in favour of them, and the streams of mercy shall flow in the usual channel: Then *I will hear, saith the Lord; I will receive your prayers* (so the Chaldee interprets the first *hearing*); God will graciously take notice of their addresses to him. And then *I will hear the heavens; I will answer them* (so it may be read); and then they shall *hear and answer the earth*, and pour down seasonable rain upon it; and then the *earth shall hear the corn and vines*, and supply them with moisture, and *they shall hear Jezreel*, and be nourishment and refreshment for those that inhabit Jezreel. See here the coherence of second causes with one another, as links in a chain, and the necessary dependence they all have upon God, the first Cause. Note, We must expect all our comforts from God in the usual method and by the appointed means; and, when we are at any time disappointed in them, we must look up to God, *above the hills and the mountains*, Ps. cxxi. 1, 2. See how ready the creatures are to serve the people of God, how desirous of the honour: the corn cries to the earth, the earth to the heavens, the heavens to God, and all that they may supply them. And see how ready God is to give relief: *I will hear, saith the Lord, yea, I will hear.* And, if God will hear the cry of the heavens for his people, much more will he hear the intercession of his Son for them, who is made *higher than the heavens*. See what a peculiar delight those that are in covenant with God may take in their creature-comforts, as seeing them all come to them from the hand of God; they can trace up all the streams to the fountain, and taste covenant-love in common mercies, which makes them doubly sweet.

VI. That whereas they were now dispersed, not only, as Simeon and Levi, divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel, but divided and scattered all the world over, God will turn this curse, as he did that, into a blessing: "I will not only water the earth for her, but will *sow her unto me in the earth*"; her dispersion shall be not like that of the chaff in the floor, which the *wind drives away*, but like that of the seed in the field, in order to its greater increase; wherever they are scattered they shall *take root downward and bear fruit upward*. *The good seed are the children of the kingdom. I will sow her unto me.*" This alludes to the name Jezreel, which signifies *sown of God, or for God*; as she was scattered of him (which is one signification of the words) so she shall be sown

of him; and to what he sows he will give the increase. When in all parts of the world Christianity got footing, and every where there were professors of it, then this promise was fulfilled, *I will sow her unto me in the earth*. Note, The greatest blessing of this earth is that God has a church in it, and from that arises all the tribute of glory which he has out of it; it is what he has sown to himself, and what he will therefore secure to himself.

VII. That, whereas they had been *Lo-ammi—not a people*, and *Lo-ruhamah—not finding mercy* with God, now they shall be restored to his favour and taken again into covenant with him (v. 23): *They had not obtained mercy*, but seemed to be abandoned; they were *not my people*, not distinguished, not dealt with, as my people, but left to lie in common with the nations. 'This was the case with the rejected Jews; and the same, or more deplorable, was that of the Gentile world (to whom the apostle applies this, Rom. ix. 24, 25), that had *no hope*, and was *without God in the world*; but when great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were, upon their believing in Christ, incorporated into a Christian church, then, 1. God had mercy on those who *had not obtained mercy*. Those found favour with God, and became the children of his love, who had been long out of favour and the children of his wrath, and, if infinite mercy had not interposed, would have been for ever so. Note, God's mercy must not be despaired of any where on this side hell. 2. He took those into a covenant-relation to himself who had been strangers and foreigners. He says to them, "*Thou art my people*, whom I will own and bless, protect and provide for;" and they shall say, "*Thou art my God*, whom I will serve and worship, and to whose honour I will be entirely and for ever devoted." Note, (1.) The sum total of the happiness of believers is the mutual relation that is between them and God, that he is theirs and they are his; this is the crown of all the promises. (2.) This relation is founded in free grace. We have not chosen him, but he has chosen us. He first says, *They are my people*, and makes them willing to be so in the day of his power, and then they avouch him to be theirs. (3.) As we need desire no more to make us happy than to be the people of God, so we need desire no more to make us easy and cheerful than to have him to assure us that we are so, to say unto us, by his Spirit witnessing with ours, *Thou art my people*. (4.) Those that have accepted the Lord for their God must avouch him to be so, must go to him in prayer and tell him so, *Thou art my God*, and must be ready to make profession before men. (5.) It adds to the comfort of our covenant with God that in it there is a communion of saints, who, though they are many, yet here are one. It is not, I will say to them, *You are my people*, but,



*Thou art*; for he looks upon them as all *one in Christ*, and, as such in him, he speaks to them and covenants with them; and they also do not say, *Thou art our God*, for they look upon themselves as one body, and desire with one mind and one mouth to glorify him, and therefore say, *Thou art my God*. Or it intimates that such a covenant as God made of old with his people Israel, in general, now under the gospel he makes with particular believers, and says to *each of them*, even the meanest, with as much pleasure as he did of old to the *thousands of Israel*, *Thou art my people*, and invites and encourages each of them to say, *Thou art my God*, and to triumph therein, as Moses and all Israel did. Exod. xv. 2, He is *my God*, and *my father's God*.

## CHAP. III.

God is still by the prophet inculcating the same thing upon this careless people, and much in the same manner as before, by a type or sign, that of the dealings of a husband with an adulterous wife. In this chapter we have, I. The bad character which the people of Israel now had; they were, as is said of the Athenians (Acts xvii. 15), "wholly given to idolatry;" ver. 1. II. The low condition which they should be reduced to by their captivity, and the other instances of God's controversy with them, ver. 2-4. III. The blessed reformation that should at length be wrought upon them in the latter days, ver. 5.

**T**HEN said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of *her* friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. 2 So I bought her to me for fifteen *pieces* of silver, and *for* a homer of barley, and a half homer of barley: 3 And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for *another* man: so *will* I also *be* for thee. 4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and *without* teraphim: 5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

Some think that this chapter refers to Judah, the two tribes, as the adulteress the prophet married (*ch. i. 3*) represented the *ten tribes*; for this was not to be divorced, as the ten tribes were, but to be left desolate for a long time, and then to return, as the two tribes did. But these are called the *children of Israel*, which was the ten tribes, and therefore it is more probable that of them this parable, as well as that before, is to be understood. Go, and repeat it, says God to the prophet; Go yet again. Note, For the conviction and reduction of sinners

it is necessary that precept be upon precept, and line upon line. If they will not believe one sign, try another, Exod. iv. 8, 9. Now, I. In this parable we may observe,

1. God's goodness and Israel's badness strangely serving for a foil to each other, v. 1. Israel is as a woman *beloved of her friend*, either of him that has married her or of him that only courts her, and yet an *adulteress*; such is the case between God and Israel. We say of those whose affection is mutual that there is *no love lost* between them; but here we find a great deal of the love even of God himself lost and thrown away upon an unworthy ungrateful people. The God of Israel retains a very great love for the *children of Israel*, and yet they are an evil and adulterous generation. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth!* (1.) That God's goodness has not put an end to their badness; the Lord loves them, has a kindness for them, and is continually showing kindness to them; they know it, they cannot but own it, that he has been as a friend and Father to them; and yet they *look to other gods*, gods that they can see, and to the love of which they are drawn by the eye; they look to them with an eye of adoration (they offer up all their services to them) and with an eye of dependence (they expect all their comforts from them); if they were restrained from bowing the knee to idols, yet they gave them an amorous glance, and had *eyes full of that spiritual adultery*. And they loved *flagons of wine*; they joined with idolaters because they lived merrily and drank hard; they had a kindness for *other gods* for the sake of the plenty of good wine with which they had been sometimes treated in their temples. Idolatry and sensuality commonly go together; those that make a god of their belly, as drunkards do, will easily be brought to make a god of any thing else. God's priests were to *drink no wine* when they went in to minister, and his Nazarites none at all. But the worshippers of other gods *drank wine in bowls*; nay, no less than *flagons of wine* would content them. (2.) That their badness had not put an end to God's goodness, and stopped the current of his favours to them. This is a wonder of mercy indeed, that she is thus *beloved of her friend, though an adulteress*; such is the love of the Lord towards the children of Israel. "Go," says God, "love such a woman; see if thou canst find in thy heart to do it. No, thou canst not, the breast of no man would admit such a love; yet such is my love to the children of Israel; it is love to the loveless, to the unlovely, to those that have a thousand times forfeited it." Note, In God's goodwill to poor sinners his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, and his love is more condescending and compassionate than ours is, or can be; in this, as much as any thing, he is *God, and not man*, Hos. xi. 9.

2. The method found for the bringing of

a God so very good and a people so very bad together again; this is the thing aimed at, and what God aims at he will accomplish. To our great surprise, we find a breach thus wide as the sea effectually healed; miracles cease not so long as divine mercy does not cease. Observe here, (1.) The course God takes to humble them and make them know themselves (v. 2): *I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a homer and a half of barley*, that is, I courted her to be reconciled, to leave her ill courses, and return to her first husband, as *ch. ii. 14. I allured her, and spoke comfortably to her*; as the *Levite who went after his concubine* that had *played the harlot* from him, and had run away with another man, *spoke friendly to her*, Judg. xix. 3. But here the present which the prophet brought her for the purchasing of her favour is observed to be a very small one; but it was all that was intended for her separate maintenance, and in it she is reduced to a short allowance, and, to punish her for her pride, is made to look very mean. When Samson went to be reconciled to his wife that had disobliged him he *visited her with a kid* (Judg. xv. 1), which was a genteel entertainment. But the prophet here visited his wife with *fifteen pieces of silver*, a small sum, which yet she must be content to live upon a great while, so long as till her husband thought fit to restore her to her first estate. She shall also have *a homer and a half of barley*, for bread-corn, and that is all she must expect till she be sufficiently humbled, and, by a competent time of trial, satisfactory proof given that she is indeed reformed. Let her be made sensible that it is not for her own merit that her husband makes court to her; it is but a lame price that he values her at. The price of a servant was thirty shekels, Exod. xxi. 32. This was but half so much; yet let her know that it is more than she is worth. God had given Egypt for Israel's ransom once, so precious were they then in his sight, and so honourable, Isa. xliii. 3, 4. But now that they have gone a whoring from him he will give but fifteen pieces of silver for them, so much have they lost in their value by their iniquity. Note, Those whom God designs honour and comfort for he first makes sensible of their own worthlessness, and brings them to acknowledge, with the prodigal, *I am no more worthy to be called thy son*. Time was when Israel was *fed with the finest of the wheat*, but they grew wanton, and *loved flagons of wine*, and therefore, in order to the humbling and reducing of them, they must be brought in the land of their captivity to eat barley-bread, and be thankful they can get it, and to eat that too by weight and measure, whereas they did not use to be stinted. Note, Poverty and disgrace sometimes prove a happy means of making great sinners true penitents. (2.) The new terms upon which God is willing to come with them (v. 3):

*Thou shalt abide for me many days, and shalt not be for another, so will I be for thee*. He might justly have given them a bill of divorce, and have resolved to have no more to do with them; but he is willing to show them kindness, and that the matter should be compromised; he deals not with them in strict justice, according to the rigour of the law, but according to the multitude of his mercies; and it represents God's gracious dealings with the apostate race of mankind, that had gone a whoring from him; he bought them indeed with an inestimable price, not for their honour, but for the honour of his own justice; and now this is the proposal he makes to them, the covenant of grace he is willing to enter into with them—they must be to him a people, and he will be to them a God, the same with the proposal here made to Israel. [1.] They must take to themselves the shame of their apostasy from him, must submit to, and accept of, the punishment of their iniquity: *Thou shalt abide for me many days in solitude and silence*, as a widow that is *desolate* and in sorrow; they must *lay aside their ornaments*, and wait with patience and submission to know what God will do with them, and whether he will please to admit such unworthy wretches into his favour again, as they did Exod. xxxiii. 4, 5. *Their father*, their husband, has *spit in their face* (as God said concerning Miriam), has put them under the marks of his displeasure, and therefore, like her, they must be *ashamed seven days*, and be *shut out of the camp* (Num. xii. 14), till *their uncircumcised hearts be humbled*, Lev. xxvi. 41. Let them *sit alone and keep silence, waiting for the salvation of the Lord*, and in the mean time let them *bear the yoke*, Lam. iii. 26—28. Let them not expect that God should speedily return in mercy to them, as sometimes he has done, that comfort should come over cheap and easy to them; no, let them want it, let them wait for it *many days*, during all the days of their captivity, and reckon it a miracle of mercy, and well worth waiting for, if it come at last. Note, Those whom God designs mercy for he will first bring to abase themselves and to put a high value upon his favours. [2.] They must never return to folly again; that is the condition upon which God will *speake peace to his people and to his saints* (Ps. lxxxv. 8), and no other. "*Thou shalt not play the harlot, shalt not worship idols in the land of thy captivity, while thou art there set apart for thy uncleanness*." Note, It is not enough to take shame to ourselves for the sins we have committed, and to justify God in correcting us for them, but we must resolve, in the strength of God's grace, that we will not offend any more, that we will not again go a whoring from God, after the world and the flesh. Blessed be God, though it is the law of the covenant, it is not the condition of it that we shall never in any thing do amiss: "But



thou shalt not *play the harlot*; thou shalt not serve other gods, *shalt not be for another man.*" In the land of their captivity they would be courted to worship the idols of the country; that would be a trial for them, a long trial, many days: "But if thou keep thy ground, and hold fast thy integrity, if, when *all this comes upon thee*, thou dost not *stretch out thy hand to a strange god*, thou wilt be qualified for the returns of God's favour."

Note, It is a certain sign that our afflictions are means of much good to us, and earnestness of more, when we are kept by the grace of God from being overcome by the temptations of an afflicted state. [3.] Upon these terms their Maker will again be their husband: *So will I also be for thee.* This is the covenant between God and returning sinners, that, if they will be for him to serve him, he will be for them to save them. Let them renounce and abjure all rivals with God for the throne in the heart, and devote themselves entirely to him and him only, and he will be to them a God all-sufficient. If we be faithful and constant to God in a way of duty, and will never leave nor forsake him, he will be so to us in a way of mercy, and will never leave nor forsake us. And a fairer proposal could not be made.

II. In the last two verses we have the interpretation of the parable and the application of it to Israel.

1. They must long *sit like a widow*, stripped of all their joys and honours, Lam. iv. 1, 2. *They shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince*; and a nation in this condition may well be called a widow. They want the blessing, (1.) Of civil government: *They shall abide without a king, and without a prince*, of their own. There were kings and princes over them to oppress them and rule them with rigour, but they had no king nor prince to protect them, to fight their battles for them, to administer justice to them, and to take care of their common safety and welfare. Note, Magistracy is a very great blessing to a people, and it is a sad and sore judgment to want it. (2.) Of public worship: *They shall abide without a sacrifice, and without an image* (or a statue, or pillar; the word is used concerning the pillars Jacob erected, Gen. xxviii. 18; xxxi. 45; xxxv. 20), and *without an ephod and teraphim.* The *teraphim* being here closely joined to the *ephod*, some think the *urim* and *thummim* were meant by it in the breast-plate of the high priest. The meaning is that in their captivity they should not only have no face of a nation upon them, but no face of a church; they should not have (as a learned expositor speaks) liberty of any public profession or exercise of religion, either true or false, according to their choice. They shall have *no sacrifice or altar* (so the LXX.), and therefore no sacrifice because no altar. They shall have *no ephod*, nor *teraphim*, no legal priesthood, no means of knowing God's

mind, no oracle to consult in doubtful cases, but shall be all in the dark. Note, The case of those is very melancholy that are deprived of all opportunities to worship God in public. This was the case of the Jews in their captivity; and it is so far the case of the scattered Jews at this day that, though they have their synagogues, they have no temple-service. Desolate indeed is their condition that are shut out from communion with God, that have no opportunity of directing their addresses to God by sacrifice and altar, and of receiving instructions from him by ephod and teraphim.

2. They shall at length be received again as a wife (v. 5): *Afterwards*, in process of time, when they have gone through this discipline, *they shall return*, that is, they shall repent of their idolatries and forsake them, they shall apply themselves to God and adhere to him, and herein they shall be accepted of him. Two things are here promised as instances of their return, and steps towards their acceptance with God in their return:—(1.) The enquiries they shall make after God: *They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king.* Note, Those that would find God, and find favour with him, must seek him, must ask after him, covet acquaintance with him, desire to be reconciled to him, set their love on him, and labour in this that they may be accepted of him. Their seeking him implies that they had lost him, that they were lamenting their loss, and that they were solicitous to retrieve what they had lost. They shall seek him as *their God*; for *should not a people seek unto their God?* And they shall seek *David their King*, who can be no other than the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the root and offspring of David, whom David himself called *Lord* (Ps. cx. 1), and to whom God gave the *throne of his father David*, Luke i. 32. The Chaldee reads it, *They shall seek the service of the Lord their God, and shall obey Messiah, the Son of David their king.* Compare this with Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; xxxvii. 25. Note, Those that would seek the Lord so as to find him must apply to Jesus Christ, and must seek to him as their King, and become his willing people, and take an oath of fealty and allegiance to him. (2.) The reverence they shall have of God: *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness.* Some by his *goodness* here understand the temple, towards which they shall look, in worshipping God. The Jews say, There were three things which Israel cast off in the days of Rehoboam—the *kingdom of heaven*, the *family of David*, and the *house of the sanctuary*; and it will never be well with them till they return, and seek them all three, which is here promised. They shall seek the kingdom of heaven in *the Lord their God*, the royal family in *David their King*, and the temple in *the goodness of the Lord*. Others by his *goodness* under-

stand Christ, the same *with David their King*. But it is rather to be taken for that attribute of God which he showed as his glory, and by which he proclaimed his name. Note, It is not only the Lord and his greatness that we are to fear, but the Lord and his goodness, not only his majesty, but his mercy. They shall *flee for fear to the Lord and his goodness* (so some take it), shall flee to it as their city of refuge. We must *fear God's goodness*, that is, we must admire it, and stand amazed at it, must adore it, and *worship* as Moses did at the proclaiming of this name, Exod. xxxiv. 6. We must be afraid of offending his goodness, of making any ungrateful returns for it, and so forfeiting it. *There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared*, Ps. cxxx. 4. We must *rejoice with trembling* in the goodness of God, must not be *high-minded, but fear*. Now this promise had its accomplishment when by the gospel of Christ great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were brought home to God, and incorporated in the New-Testament church, served God in Christ, with a filial fear of divine grace, and were accepted of God as his Israel. And some think it is to be yet further accomplished in the conversion of those Jews to the faith of Christ who shall remain in unbelief, when they shall seek their Messiah as *David their King*, and by him *all Israel shall be saved*, when the *fulness of the Gentiles is brought in*. Time was when they sought him to put him to death, saying, *We have no king but Cæsar*; but the day is coming when they shall seek him to *appoint him their head*, and to lay their necks under his yoke. He that has here promised that they shall do it will enable them to do it, and bring about this great work in his own way and time, *in the latter days of the last times*, the times of the Messiah: but, alas! who shall live when God does this? How far we are to expect a general conversion of that nation I cannot say; but I am sure we ought to pray that the Jews may be converted.

## CHAP. IV.

Prophets were sent to be reprovers, to tell people of their faults, and to warn them of the judgments of God, to which by sin they exposed themselves; so the prophet is employed in this and the following chapters. Life is here, as counsel for the King of kings, opening an indictment against the people of Israel, and labouring to convince them of sin, and of their misery and danger because of sin, that he might prevail with them to repent and reform. I. He shows them what were the grounds of God's controversy with them, a general prevalency of vice and profaneness (ver. 1, 2), ignorance and forgetfulness of God (ver. 6, 7), the worldly-mindedness of the priests (ver. 8), drunkenness and uncleanness (ver. 11), using divination and witchcraft (ver. 12), offering sacrifice in the high places (ver. 13), whoredoms (ver. 14, 18), and bribery among magistrates, ver. 18. II. He shows them what would be the consequences of God's controversy. God would punish them for these things, ver. 9. The whole land should be laid waste (ver. 3), all sorts of people cut off (ver. 5), their honour lost (ver. 7), their creature-comforts unsatisfying (ver. 10), and themselves made ashamed, ver. 15. And, which is several times mentioned here as the sorest judgment of all, they should be left alone in their sins (ver. 17), they shall not reprove one another (ver. 4), God will not punish them (ver. 14), nay, he will let them prosper, ver. 16. III. He gives warning to Judah not to tread in the steps of Israel, because they ~~are~~ their steps went down to hell, ver. 15.

**H**EAR the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD

hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land*. 2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. 3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. 4 Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people *are* as they that strive with the priest. 5 Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.

Here is, I. The court set, and both attendance and attention demanded: "*Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel*, for to you is the word of this conviction sent, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear." Whom may God expect to give him a fair hearing, and take from him a fair warning, but the children of Israel, his own professing people? Yea, they will be ready enough to hear when God speaks comfortably to them; but are they willing to hear when he has a controversy with them? Yes, they must hear him when he pleads against them, when he has something to lay to their charge: *The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land*, of this land, of this holy land. Note, Sin is the great mischief-maker; it sows discord between God and Israel. God sees sin in his own people, and a good action he has against them for it. Some more particular actions lie against his own people, which do not lie against other sinners. He has a controversy with them for breaking covenant with him, for bringing a reproach upon him, and for an ungrateful return to him for his favours. God's controversy will be pleaded, pleaded by the judgments of his mouth before they are pleaded by the judgments of his hand, that he may be justified in all he does and may make it appear that he desires not the death of sinners; and God's pleadings ought to be attended to, for, sooner or later, they shall have a hearing.

II. The indictment read, by which the whole nation stands charged with crimes of a heinous nature, by which God is highly provoked. 1. They are charged with national omissions of the most important duties: *There is no truth nor mercy, neither justice nor charity, these most weighty matters of the law*, as our Saviour accounts them (Matt. xxiii. 23), *judgment, mercy, and faith*. The



generality of the people seemed to have no sense at all of the thing called honesty; they made no conscience of what they said and did, though ever so contrary to the truth and injurious to their neighbour. Much less had they any sense of mercy, or any obligation they were under to pity and help the poor. And it is not strange that there is no truth and mercy when there is no knowledge of God in the land. What good can be expected where there is no knowledge of God? It was the privilege of that land that in Israel God was made known, and his name was great, which was an aggravation of their sin, that they did not know him, Ps. lxxvi. 1. 2. Hence follow national commissions of the most enormous sins against both the first and second table, for they had no regard at all to either. *Swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery*, against the third, ninth, sixth, eighth, and seventh commandments, were to be found in all corners of the land, and among all orders and degrees of men among them, v. 2. The corruption was universal; what good people there were among them were either lost or hid, or they hid themselves. By these they break out, that is, they transgress all bounds of reason and conscience, and the divine law; *they have exceeded* (Job xxxvi. 9); they have been *overmuch wicked* (Eccl. vii. 17); they suffer their corruptions to break out; they themselves break over, and break through, all that stands in their way and would stop them in their sinful career, as water overflows the banks. Note, Sin is a violent thing and its power exorbitant; when men's hearts are *fully set in them to do evil* (Eccl. viii. 11) *what will be restrained from them?* Gen. xi. 6. When they break out thus *blood touches blood*, that is, abundance of murders are committed in all parts of the country, and, as it were, in a constant series and succession. *Cades alie aliis sunt contiguae—Murders touch murders*; a stream of blood runs down among them, even royal blood. It was about this time that there was so much blood shed in grasping at the crown; Shallum slew Zechariah, and Menahem slew Shallum, Pekah slew Pekahiah, and Hoshea slew Pekah; and the like bloody work, it is likely, there was among other contenders, so that the land was *polluted with blood* (Ps. cvi. 38); *it was filled with blood from one end to the other*, 2 Kings xxi. 16.

III. Sentence passed upon this guilty and polluted land, v. 3. It shall be utterly destroyed and laid waste. The whole land is infected with sin, and therefore *the whole land shall mourn* under God's sore judgments, shall sit in mourning, being stripped of all its wealth and beauty. As the valleys are said to *shout for joy, and sing*, when there are plenty and peace, so here they are said to *mourn* when by war and famine they are made desolate. *The whole land shall be*

*brimstone, and salt, and burning*, was as threatened in the law, Deut. xxix. 33. They had broken all God's commandments, and now God threatens to take away all their comforts. *The land mourns* when there is neither grass for the cattle nor herbs for the service of man; and then every one that dwells therein shall languish for want of nice food to support a wasting life, and fret for want of the usual dainties for delight. The *beasts of the field* will languish, Jer. xiv. 5, 6. Nay, the destruction of the fruits of the earth shall be so great that there shall not be picking for the *fowls of the air*, to keep them alive; they shall suffer with man, and their dying, or growing lean, will be a punishment to those who used to have their tables replenished with wild-fowl. Nay, the *fishes of the sea shall be taken away*, or gathered together, that they may go away in shoals to some other coast, and then the fishing trade will be worth nothing. This desolation shall be in that respect more general than that by Noah's flood, for that did not affect the fishes of the sea, but this shall. It was part of one of the plagues of Egypt that he *slew their fish* (Ps. cv. 29); when the waters are dried the *fish die*, Isa. l. 2; Zeph. i. 2, 3. Note, When man becomes disobedient to God, it is just that the inferior creatures should be made unserviceable to man. Oh what reason have we to admire God's patience and mercy to our land, that though there is in it so much swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and adultery, yet there is plenty of flesh, and fish, and fowl, on our tables!

IV. An order of court that no pains should be taken with the condemned criminal to bring him to repentance, with the reason for that order. Observe, 1. The order itself (v. 4): *Yet let no man strive nor reprove another*; let no means be used to reduce and reclaim them; let their physicians give them up as desperate and past cure. It intimates that as long as there is any hope we ought to reprove sinners for their sins; it is a duty we owe to one another to give and to take reproofs; it was one of the laws of Moses (Lev. xix. 17), *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour*; it is an instance of brotherly love. Sometimes there is need to rebuke sharply, not only to reprove, but to strive, so loth are men to part with their sins. But it is a sign that persons and people are abandoned to ruin when God says, *Let them not be reprov'd*. Yet this is to be understood as God's commands sometimes to the prophets not to pray for them, notwithstanding which they did pray for them; but the meaning is, They are so hardened in sin, and so ripened for ruin, that it will be to little purpose either to deal with them or to deal with God for them. Note, It bodes ill to a people when reprovers are silenced, and when those who should witness against the sins of the times, retire in-

to a corner, and give up the cause. See 2 Chron. xxv. 16. 2. The reasons of this order. Let them not reprove one another; for, (1.) They are determined to *go on in sin*, and no reproofs will cure them of that: *Thy people are as those that strive with the priests*; they have grown so very impudent in sin, so very insolent, and impatient of reproof, that they will fly in the face even of a priest himself if he should but give them the least check, without any regard to his character and office; and how then can it be thought that they should take a reproof from a private person? Note, Those sinners have their hearts wickedly hardened who quarrel with their ministers for dealing faithfully with them; and those who rebel against ministerial reproof, which is an ordinance of God for their reformation, have forfeited the benefit of brotherly reproof too. Perhaps this may refer to the late wickedness of Joash king of Judah, and his people, who stoned Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, for delivering them a message from God, 2 Chron. xxiv. 21. He was a *priest*; with him they *strove* when he was officiating *between the temple and the altar*; and Dr. Lightfoot thinks the prophet had an eye to his case when he spoke (v. 2) of *blood touching blood*; the blood of the sacrificer was mingled with the blood of the sacrifice, That, says he, was the *apex of their wickedness*—thence their ruin was to be dated (Matt. xxiii. 35), as this is of *their incorrigibleness*, that they are as those who *strive with the priest*, therefore let no man reprove them; for, (2.) God also is determined to *proceed in their ruin* (v. 5): “*Therefore, because thou wilt take no reproof, no advice, thou shalt fall*, and it is in vain for any to think of preventing it, for the decree has gone forth. Thou shalt stumble and fall in the day, and the prophet, the false prophet that flattered and seduced thee, shall fall with thee in the night; both thou and thy prophet shall fall night and day, shall be continually falling into one calamity or other; the darkness of the night shall not help to cover thee from trouble nor the light of the day help thee to flee from it.” The prophets are blind leaders and the people blind followers; and to the blind day and night are alike, so that whether it be day or night both shall fall together into the ditch. “Thou shalt fall in the day, when thy fall is least feared by thyself and thou art very secure; and in the day, when it will be seen and observed by others, and turn most to thy shame; and the prophet shall fall in the night, when to himself it will be most terrible.” Note, The ruin of those who have helped to ruin others will, in a special manner, be intolerable. And did the children think that when they were in danger of falling their mother would help them? It shall be in vain to expect it, for *I will destroy thy mother*, Samaria, the mother-city, the whole state, or kingdom, which is as a mother to

every part. It shall all be *made silent*. Note, When all are involved in guilt nothing less can be expected than that all should be involved in ruin.

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. 7 As they were increased, so they sinned against me: *therefore* will I change their glory into shame. 8 They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. 9 And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. 10 For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD. 11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

God is here proceeding in his controversy both with the priests and with the people. *The people* were as those that *strove with the priests* (v. 4) when they had priests that did their duty; but the generality of them lived in the neglect of their duty, and here is a word for those priests, and for the people that love to have it so, Jer. v. 31. And it is observable here how the punishment answers to the sin, and how, for the justifying of his own proceedings, God sets the one over-against the other.

1. The people *strove with the priests* that should have taught them the knowledge of God; justly therefore were they *destroyed for lack of knowledge*, v. 6. Note, Those that rebel against the light can expect no other than to perish in the dark. Or it is a charge upon the priests, who should have been still *teaching the people knowledge* (Eccl. xii. 9), but they did not, or did it in such a manner that it was as if they had not done it at all, so there was *no knowledge of God in the land*; and because there was no vision, or none to any purpose, the people *perished*, Prov. xxix. 18. Note, Ignorance is so far from being the mother of devotion that it is the mother of destruction; lack of knowledge is ruining to any person or people. They are *my people* that are thus *destroyed*; their relation to God as his people aggravates both their sin in not taking pains to get the knowledge of that God whose command they were under and with whom they were taken into covenant, and likewise the sin of those who should have taught them; God set his children to school to them, and they never minded them, nor took any pains with them.



II. Both priests and people rejected knowledge; and justly therefore will God *reject them*. The reason why the people did not learn, and the priests did not teach, was not because they had not the light, but because they hated it—not because they had not ways of coming to the knowledge of God and of communicating it, but because they had no heart to it; they *rejected* it. They *desired not the knowledge of God's ways*, but put it from them, and shut their eyes against the light; and therefore “*I will also reject thee; I will refuse to take cognizance of thee and to own thee; you will not know me, but bid me depart; I will therefore say, Depart from me, I know you not. Thou shalt be no priest to me.*” 1. The priests shall be no longer admitted to the privileges, or employed in the services, of the priesthood, nor shall they ever be received again, as we find, Ezek. xlv. 13. Note, Ministers that reject knowledge, that are grossly ignorant and scandalous, ought not to be owned as ministers; but that which they *seem to have* should be *taken away*, Luke viii. 18. 2. The people shall be no longer as they have been, a *kingdom of priests*, a royal priesthood, Exod. xix. 6. God's people, by rejecting knowledge, forfeit their honour and profane their own crown.

III. They *forgot the law of God*, neither desired nor endeavoured to retain it in mind, nor to transmit the remembrance of it to their posterity, and therefore justly will God *forget them and their children*, the people's children; they did not educate them, as they ought to have done, in the knowledge of God and their duty to him, and therefore God will disown them, as not in covenant with him. Note, If parents do not teach their children, when they are young, to *remember their Creator*, they cannot expect that their Creator should remember them. Or it may be meant of the priests' children; they shall not succeed them in the priests' office, but shall be reduced to poverty, as is threatened against Eli's house, 1 Sam. ii. 20.

IV They dishonoured God with that which was their honour, and justly therefore will God strip them of it, v. 7. It was their honour that they were increased in number, wealth, power, and dignity. The beginning of their nation was small, but in process of time it *greatly increased*, and grew very considerable; the family of the priests increased wonderfully. But, *as they were increased, so they sinned* against God. The more populous the nation grew, the more sin was committed and the more profane they were; their wealth, honour, and power, did but make them the more daring in sin. Therefore, says God, *will I change their glory into shame*. Are their numbers their glory? God will diminish them and make them few. Is their wealth their glory? God will impoverish them and bring them low; so that they

shall themselves be ashamed of that which they gloried in. Their priests shall be made *contemptible and base*, Mal. ii. 9. Note, That which is our honour, if we dishonour God with it, will sooner or later be turned into shame to us: for *those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed*, 1 Sam. ii. 30.

V. The priests ate up the sin of God's people, and therefore *they shall eat and not have enough*. 1. They abused the maintenance that was allowed to the priests, to the priests of the house of Aaron, by the law of God, and to the mock-priests of the calves by their constitution (v. 8): *They eat up the sin of my people*, that is, their sin-offerings. If it be meant of the priests of the calves, it intimates their seizing that which they had no right to; they usurped the revenues of the priests, though they were no priests. If it be meant of those who were legal priests, it intimates their greediness of the profits and perquisites of their office, when they took no care at all to do the duty of it. They feasted upon their part of the offerings of the Lord, but forgot the work for which they were so well paid. They *set their hearts* upon the people's *iniquities*; they *lifted up their soul* to them, that is, they were glad when people did commit iniquity, that they might be obliged to bring an offering to make atonement for it, which they should have their share of; the more sins the more sacrifices, and therefore they cared not how much sin people were guilty of. Instead of warning the people against sin, from the consideration of the sacrifices, which showed them what an offence sin was to God, since it needed such an expiation, they emboldened and encouraged the people to sin, since an atonement might be made at so small an expense. Thus they glutted themselves upon the sins of the people, and helped to keep up that which they should have beaten down. Note, It is a very wicked thing to be well pleased with the sins of others because, in some way or other, they may turn to our advantage. 2. God will therefore deny them his blessing upon their maintenance (v. 10): *They shall eat and not have enough*. Though they have great plenty by the abundance of offerings that are brought in, yet they shall have no satisfaction in it. Either their food shall yield no good nourishment or their greedy appetites shall not be satisfied with it. Note, What is unlawfully gained cannot be comfortably used; no, nor that which is inordinately coveted; it is just that the desires which are insatiable should always be unsatisfied, and that those should never have enough who never know when they have enough. See Mic. vi. 14; Hag. i. 6.

VI. The more they increased the more they sinned (v. 7), and therefore though they *commit whoredom*, though they take the most wicked methods to multiply their people, yet *they shall not increase*. Though they have many wives and concubines, as Solomon had,

yet they shall not have their families built up thereby in a numerous progeny, any more than he had. Note, Those that hope any way to increase by unlawful means will be disappointed. And therefore God will thus blast all their projects *because they have left off to take heed to the Lord*; time was when they had some regard to God, and to his authority over them and interest in them, but they have *left it off*; they take no heed to his word nor to his providences; they do not eye him in either. *They forsake him, so as not to take heed to him*; they have apostatized to such a degree that they have no manner of regard to God, but are perfectly *without God in the world*. Note, Those that leave off to take heed to the Lord leave off all good, and can expect no other than that all good should leave them.

VII. The people and the priests did harden one another in sin; and therefore justly shall they be sharers in the punishment (v. 9): *There shall be, like people, like priest*. So they were in character; people and priest were both alike ignorant and profane, regardless of God and their duty, and addicted to idolatry: and so they shall be in condition; God will bring judgments upon them, that shall be the destruction both of priest and people; the famine that deprives the people of their meat shall deprive the priests of their *meat-offerings*, Joel i. 9. It is part of the description of a universal desolation that it shall be *as with the people, so with the priest*, Isa. xxiv. 2. God's judgments, when they come with commission, will make no difference. Note, Sharers in sin must expect to be sharers in ruin. Thus God will *punish them both for their ways, and reward them for their doings*. God will *cause their doings to return upon them* (so the word is); when a sin is committed the sinner thinks *it is gone* and he shall hear no more of it, but he shall find it *called over again*, and made to *return*, either to his humiliation or to his condemnation.

VIII. They indulged themselves in the delights of sense, to hold up their hearts; but they shall find that *they take away their hearts* (v. 11): *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine take away the heart*. Some join this with the foregoing words, *They have forsaken the Lord, to take heed to whoredom, and wine, and new wine*. Or, *Because these have taken away their heart*. Their sensual pleasures have taken them off from their devotions and drowned all that is good in them. Or we may take it as a distinct sentence, containing a great truth which we see confirmed by every day's experience, that drunkenness and uncleanness are sins which besot and infatuate men, weaken and enfeeble them. They take away both the understanding and the courage.

12 My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto

them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused *them* to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.

13 They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof *is good*: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery. 14 I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people *that doth not understand* shall fall. 15 Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, *yet let not Judah offend*; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth. 16 For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place. 17 Ephraim *is joined to idols*: let him alone. 18 Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers *with shame do love*, Give ye. 19 The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

In these verses we have, as before,

I. The sins charged upon the people of Israel, for which God had a controversy with them, and they are,

1. Spiritual whoredom, or idolatry. They have in them a *spirit of whoredoms*, a strong inclination to that sin; the bent and bias of their hearts are that way; it is *their own iniquity*; they are carried out towards it with an unaccountable violence, and this *causes them to err*. Note, The errors and mistakes of the judgment are commonly owing to the corrupt affections; men *therefore* have a good opinion of sin, because they have a disposition towards it. And having such erroneous notions of idols, and such passionate motions towards them, no marvel that with such a head and such a heart they have *gone a whoring from under their God*, v. 12. They ought to have been in subjection to him as their head and husband, to have been under his guidance and command, but they revolted from their allegiance, and put themselves under the guidance and protection of false gods. So (v. 15) Israel has *played the harlot*; their conduct in the worship of their idols was like that of a harlot, wanton and impudent. And (v. 16), *Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer*, as an untamed heifer



(so some), or as a *perverse* or *refractory* one (so others), as a heifer that is turned loose runs madly about the pasture, or, if put under the yoke (which seems rather to be alluded to here), will draw back instead of going forward, will struggle to get her neck out of the yoke and her feet out of the furrow. Thus unruly, ungovernable, untractable, were the people of Israel. They had begun to draw in the yoke of God's ordinances, but they drew back, as *children of Belial*, that will not endure the yoke; and when the prophets were sent with the goads of reproof, to put them forward, they *kicked against the pricks*, and ran backwards. The sum of all is (v. 17), *Ephraim is joined to idols*, is perfectly wedded to them; his affections are glued to them, and his heart is upon them. There are two instances given of their spiritual whoredom, in both which they gave that honour to their idols which is due to God only:—(1.) They consulted them as oracles, and used those arts of divination which they had learned from their idolatrous priests (v. 12): *My people ask counsel at their stocks*, their wooden gods; they apply to them for advice and direction in what they should do and for information concerning the event. *They say to a stock, Thou art my father* (Jer. ii. 27); and, if it were indeed a father, it were worthy of this honour; but it was a great affront to God, who was indeed their Father, and whose lively oracles they had among them, with which they had liberty to consult at any time, thus to *ask counsel at their stocks*. And they expect that their *staff* should *declare to them* what course they should take and what the event should be. It is probable that this refers to some wicked methods of divination used among the Gentiles, and which the Jews learned from them, by a *piece of wood*, or by a *staff*, like Nebuchadnezzar's divining by *his arrows*, Ezek. xxi. 21. Note, Those who forsake the oracles of God, to take their measures from the world and the flesh, do in effect but consult with their stocks and their staves. (2.) They offered sacrifice to them as gods, whose favour they wanted and whose wrath they dreaded and deprecated (v. 13): *They sacrifice to them*, to atone and pacify them, and *burn incense* to them, to please and gratify them, and hope by both to recommend themselves to them. God had pitched upon the place where he would record his name; but they, having forsaken that, chose places for their irreligious rites which pleased their own fancies; they chose, [1.] High places, *upon the tops of the mountains and upon the hills*, foolishly imagining that the height of the ground gave them some advantage in their approaches towards heaven. [2.] Shady places, *under oaks, and poplars, and elms, because the shadow thereof* is pleasant to them, especially in those hot countries, and therefore they thought it was pleasing to their gods; or they fancied that a thick shade be-

friends contemplation, possesses the mind with something of awe, and therefore is proper for devotion.

2. Corporal whoredom is another crime here charged upon them: *They have committed whoredom continually*, v. 18. They drove a trade of uncleanness; it was not a single act now and then, but their constant practice, as it is of many that have *eyes full of adultery and which cannot cease from that sin*, 2 Pet. ii. 14. Now the abominable filthiness and lewdness that was found in Israel is here spoken of, (1.) As a concomitant of their idolatry; their false gods drew them to it; for the devil whom they worshipped, though a spirit, is an unclean spirit. Those that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots*, and they *sacrificed with harlots*; for because they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, but dishonoured him, therefore God *gave them up to vile affections*, by the indulging of which they *dishonoured themselves*, Rom. i. 24, 28. (2.) As a punishment of it. The men that worshipped idols were *separated with harlots* that attended the idolatrous rites, as in the worship of *Baal-peor*, Num. xxv. i. 2. To punish them for that God gave up their wives and daughters to the like vile affections: *They committed whoredom and adultery* (v. 13), which could not but be a great grief and reproach to their husbands and parents; for those that are not chaste themselves desire to have their wives and daughters so. But thus they might read their sin in their punishment, as David's adultery was punished in the debauching of his concubines by his own son, 2 Sam. xii. 11. Note, When the same sin in others is made men's grief and affliction which they have themselves been guilty of they must own that the Lord is righteous.

3. The perverting of justice, v. 18. *Their rulers* (be it spoken to their shame) *do love, Give ye*, that is, they love bribes, and have it continually in their mouths, *Give, give*. They are given to *filthy lucre*; every one that has any business with them must expect to be asked, What will you give? Though, as rulers, they are bound by office to do justice, yet none can have justice done them without a fee; and you may be sure that for a fee they will do injustice. Note, The love of money is the ruin of equity and the root of all iniquity. But of all men it is a shame for rulers (who should be men *fearing God and hating covetousness*) to love *Give ye*. Perhaps this is intended in that part of the charge here, *Their drink is sour*; it is *dead*; it is *gone*. Justice, duly administered, is refreshing, like drink to the thirsty, but when it is perverted, and rulers take rewards either to acquit the guilty or to condemn the innocent, the *drink is sour*; they *turn judgment into wormwood*, Amos v. 7. Or it may refer in general to the depraved morals of the whole nation; they had lost all their life and spirit, and were as offensive to God as dead

and sour drink is to us. See Deut. xxxi. 32, 33.

II. The tokens of God's wrath against them for their sins. 1. Their wives and daughters should not be punished for the injury and disgrace they did to their families (v. 14): *I will not punish your daughters*; and, not being punished for their sin, they would go on in it. Note, The impunity of one sinner is sometimes made the punishment of another. Or, "*I will not punish them as I will punish you; for you must own, as Judah did concerning his daughter-in-law, that they are more righteous than you.*" Gen. xxxviii. 26. 2. They themselves should prosper for a while, but their prosperity should help to destroy them. It comes in as a token of God's wrath (v. 16): *The Lord will feed them as a lamb in a large place*; they shall have a fat pasture, and a large one, in which they shall be fed to the full, and fed of the best, but it shall be only to prepare them for the slaughter, as a lamb is that is so fed. If they *wax fat and kick*, they do but wax fat for the butcher. But others make them feed as a *lamb on the common*, a large place indeed, but where it has short grass and lies exposed. The Shepherd of Israel will turn them both out of his pastures and out of his protection. 3. No means should be used to bring them to repentance (v. 17) "*Ephraim is joined to idols*, is in love with them and addicted to them, and therefore *let him alone*, as v. 4, *Let no man reprove him*. Let him be given up to *his own heart's lusts*, and walk in *his own counsels*; we would have healed him, and he would not be healed, therefore forsake him." See *what their end will be*, Deut. xxxii. 20. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment for any man to be let alone in sin, for God to say concerning a sinner, "*He is joined to his idols, the world and the flesh*; he is incurably proud, covetous, or profane, an incurable drunkard or adulterer; *let him alone*; conscience, let him alone; minister, let him alone; providences, let him alone. Let nothing awaken him till the flames of hell do it." The father corrects not the rebellious son any more when he determines to disinherit him. Those that are not disturbed in their sin will be destroyed for their sin." 4. They should be hurried away with a swift and shameful destruction (v. 19): *The wind has bound her up in her wings*, to carry her away into captivity, suddenly, violently, and irresistibly; he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, Ps. lviii. 9. And then they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices, ashamed of their sin in offering sacrifice to idols, ashamed of their folly in putting themselves to such an expense upon gods that have no power to help them, and thereby making that God their enemy who has almighty power to destroy them. Note, There are sacrifices that men will one day be ashamed of. Those that have sacrificed their time, strength, honour, and all their comforts, to

the world and the flesh, will shortly be ashamed of it. Yea, and those that bring to God blind, and lame, and heartless sacrifices, will be ashamed of them too.

III. The warning given to Judah not to sin after the similitude of Israel's transgression. It is said in the close of v. 14, *Those that do not understand shall fall*; those must needs fall that do not understand how to avoid, or get over, the stumbling-blocks they meet with (and therefore *let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*), particularly the two tribes (v. 15): *Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend*. Though Israel be given to idolatry, yet let not Judah take the infection. Now, 1. This was a very needful caution. The men of Israel were brethren, and near neighbours, to the men of Judah; Israel was more numerous, and at this time in a prosperous condition, and therefore there was danger lest the men of Judah should learn their way and get a snare to their souls. Note, The nearer we are to the infection of sin the more need we have to stand upon our guard. 2. It was a very rational caution: "*Let Israel play the harlot, yet let not Judah do so*; for Judah has greater means of knowledge than Israel, has the temple and priesthood, and a king of the house of David; from Judah Shiloh is to come; and for Judah God has reserved great blessings in store; therefore *let not Judah offend*, for more is expected from them than from Israel, they will have more to answer for if they do offend, and from them God will take it more unkindly. If *Israel play the harlot*, let not Judah do so too, for then God will have no professing people in the world." God bespeaks Judah here, as Christ does the twelve, when many turned their backs upon him, *Will you also go away?* John vi. 67. Note, Those that have hitherto kept their integrity should, for that reason, still hold it fast, even in times of general apostasy. Now, to preserve Judah from offending as Israel had done, two rules are here given:—(1.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must keep at a distance from the places of idolatry: *Come not you unto Gilgal, where all their wickedness was* (ch. ix. 15; xii. 11); there they multiplied transgression (Amos iv. 4); and perhaps they contracted a veneration for that place because there it was said to Joshua, *The place where thou standest is holy ground* (Josh. v. 15); therefore they are forbidden to enter into Gilgal, Amos v. 5. And for the same reason they must not go up to Bethel, here called the house of vanity, for so Bethaven signifies, not the house of God, as Bethel signifies. Note, Those that would be kept from sin, and not fall into the devil's hands, must studiously avoid the occasions of sin and not come upon the devil's ground. (2.) That they might not be guilty of idolatry they must take heed of profaneness, and not swear, *The Lord liveth*. They are



commanded to swear, *The Lord liveth in truth and righteousness* (Jer. iv. 2); and therefore that which is here forbidden is swearing so in untruth and unrighteousness, swearing rashly and lightly, or falsely and with deceit, or swearing by the Lord and the idol, Zeph. i. 5. Note, Those that would be steady in their adherence to God must possess themselves with an awe and reverence of God, and always speak of him with solemnity and seriousness; for those that can make a jest of the true God will make a god of any thing.

## CHAP. V.

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the foregoing chapter, to discover the sin both of Israel and Judah, and to denounce the judgments of God against them. I. They are called to hearken to the charge, ver. 1, 8. II. They are accused of many sins, which are here aggravated. 1. Persecution, ver. 1, 2. 2. Spiritual whoredom, ver. 3, 4. 3. Pride, ver. 5. 4. Apostasy from God, ver. 7. 5. The tyranny of the princes, and the tameness of the people in submitting to it, ver. 10, 11. III. They are threatened with God's displeasure for their sins; he knows all their wickedness (ver. 3) and makes known his wrath against them for it, ver. 9. 1. They shall fall in their iniquity, ver. 5. 2. God will forsake them, ver. 6. 3. Their portions shall be devoured, ver. 7. 4. God will rebuke them, and pour out his wrath upon them, ver. 9, 10. 5. They shall be oppressed, ver. 11. 6. God will be as a moth to them in secret judgments (ver. 12) and as a lion in public judgments, ver. 14. IV. They are blamed for the wrong course they took under their afflictions, ver. 13. V. It is intimated that they shall at length take a right course, ver. 15. The more generally these things are expressed of so much the more general use they are for our learning, and particularly for our admonition.

**H**EAR ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment *is* toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor. 2 And the revolvers are profound to make slaughter, though I *have been* a rebuker of them all. 3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled. 4 They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms *is* in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD. 5 And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them. 6 They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find *him*; he hath withdrawn himself from them. 7 They have dealt treacherously against the LORD: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.

Here, I. All orders and degrees of men are cited to appear and answer to such things as shall be laid to their charge (v. 1): *Hear you this, O priests!* whether in holy orders

(as those in Judah, and perhaps many in Israel too, for in the ten tribes there were divers cities of priests and Levites, who, it is probable, staid in their own lot after the revolt of the ten tribes and did so much of their office as might be done at a distance from the temple) or *pretending holy orders*, as the priests of the calves, who, some think, are included here. "Hearken, ye house of Israel, the common people, and give ear, O house of the king!" let them all take notice, for they have all contributed to the national guilt, and they shall all share in the national judgments. Note, If neither the sanctity of the priesthood nor the dignity of the royal family will prevail to keep out sin, it cannot be expected that they should avail to keep out wrath. If the priests, and the house of the king, though they bear such noble characters, sin like others, their noble characters will not excuse them, but they must smart like others. Nor shall it be any plea for the house of Israel that they were misled by their priests and princes, but they shall receive their doom with them, and neither their meanness nor their multitude shall be their exemption.

II. Witness is produced against them, one instead of a thousand; it is God's omniscience (v. 3): *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me.* They have not known the LORD (v. 4), but the Lord has known them, knows their true character however disguised, knows their secret wickedness however concealed. Note, Men's rejecting the knowledge of God will not secure them from his knowledge of them; and when he contends with them he will prove their sins upon them by his own knowledge, so that it will be in vain to plead *Not guilty*.

III. Very bad things are laid to their charge. 1. They had been very ingenious and very industrious to draw people either into sin or into trouble: You have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor (v. 1), that is, such snares and nets as the huntsmen used to lay upon those mountains in pursuit of their game. When the worship of the calves was set up in Israel the patrons of that idolatry, and sticklers for it, contrived by all possible arts and wiles to draw men into it and reconcile those to it that at first had a dread of it. Note, Those that allure and entice men to sin, however they may pretend friendship and good-will, are to be looked upon as snares and nets to them, and their hands as bands, Eccl. vii. 26. But to those whom they could not seduce into sin they were as a net and a snare to bring them into trouble. Some think it was their practice to set spies in the road, and particularly upon the mountains of Mizpah and Tabor, at the times of the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, to watch if any of their people who were piously affected went thither, and to inform against them, that they might be prosecuted for it, thus

doing the devil's work, who disquiets those whom he cannot debauch. 2. They had been both very crafty and very cruel in carrying on their designs (v. 2): *The revollers are profound to make slaughter*. Note, Those who have themselves apostatized from the truths of God are often the most subtle and barbarous persecutors of those who still adhere to them. Nothing will serve them but to *make slaughter* (it is the blood of the saints that they thirst after): and with the serpent's sting they have his head; they are *profound* to do it. O the depth of the *depths of Satan*, of the wickedness of his agents, of those that have *deeply revolted*! Isa. xxxi. 6. Now that which aggravated this was the many reproofs and warnings that had been given them: *Though I have been a rebuker of them all*. The prophet had been so, a reprover by office. He had many a time told them of the evil of their ways and doings, had dealt plainly *with them all*, and had not spared either the priests or the house of the king. God himself had been a *rebuker of them all* by their own consciences and by his providences. Note, Sins against reproof are doubly sinful, Prov. xxix. 1. 3. They had committed *whoredom*, had defiled their own bodies with fleshly lusts, had defiled their own souls with the worship of idols, v. 3. This God was a witness to, though secretly committed and artfully palliated. Nay, the piercing eye of God saw the *spirit of whoredom* that was *in the midst of them*, their secret inclination and disposition to those sins, the love they had to their sins, and the dominion their sins had over them, how much they were under the power of a *spirit of whoredom*, that root of bitterness which bore all this gall and wormwood, that corrupt and poisoned fountain. 4. They had no disposition at all to come into acquaintance and communion with God. The *spirit of whoredoms*, having caused them to err from him, keeps them wandering endlessly, v. 4. (1.) *They have not known the Lord*, nor desire to know him, but have rather declined, nay, dreaded, the knowledge of him, for that would disturb them in their sinful ways. (2.) *Therefore they will not frame their doings to turn to their God*, by which it appeared that they did not know him aright. This intimates their obstinate persistence in their apostasy from God; they would not *turn to God*, though he was *their God*, theirs in covenant, by whose name they had been called, and whom they were bound to serve. They would not return to the worship of him, from which they had turned aside. Nay, *they would not frame their doings to turn to God*. They would not consider their ways, nor dispose themselves into a serious temper, nor apply their minds to think of those things that would bring them to God. It is true we cannot by our own power, without the special grace of God, turn to him; but we may by the due improvement of our own

faculties, and the common aids of his Spirit, *frame our doings* to turn to him. Those that will not do this, that *prepare not their hearts to seek the Lord* (2 Chron. xii. 14), owe it to themselves that they are not turned; they die because they will die; and to those that will do this further grace shall not be wanting. (5.) They were guilty of notorious arrogancy, and insolence in sin (v. 5): *The pride of Israel doth testify to his face*, doth witness against him that he is a rebel to God and his government. The *spirit of whoredoms* which was *in the midst of them* showed itself in the gaiety and gaudiness of their worship, as a harlot is known by her attire, Prov. vii. 10. The wantonness of her dress testifies to her face that she is not a modest woman. Or their pride in confronting the prophets God sent them and the message they brought (Jer. xliii. 2), or a haughty scornful conduct towards their brethren and those that were under them, *witnessed against them* that they were not God's people and justified God in all the humbling judgments he brought upon them. His pride testifies *in his face*; so some read it, agreeing with Isa. iii. 9, *The show of their countenance doth witness against them*. They have that *proud look* which the Lord hates. (6.) They departed from God to idols, and bred up their children in idolatry (v. 7): *They have dealt treacherously against the Lord*, as a wife, who, in contempt of the marriage covenant, forsakes her husband, and lives in adultery with another. Thus those who are guilty of spiritual idolatry, whose god is their money, whose god is their belly, *deal treacherously against the Lord*; they violate their engagements to him and frustrate his expectations from them. Note, Wilful sinners are treacherous dealers. *They have begotten strange children*, that is, their children which they have begotten are estranged from God, and trained up in a false way of worship; they are a spurious brood, as *children of fornication* (John viii. 41), whom God will disown. Note, Those deal treacherously with God indeed who not only turn from following him themselves but train up their children in wicked ways.

IV. Very sad things are made to be their doom. In general (v. 1), "*Judgment is towards you*. God is coming forth to contend with you, and to testify his displeasure against you for your sins." It is time to hearken when judgment is towards us. In particular,

1. *They shall fall in their iniquity*. This follows upon their *pride testifying to their face* (v. 5) *Therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity*. Note, Pride will have a fall; it is the certain presage and forerunner of it. Those that exalt themselves shall be abased. The face in which pride testifies shall be filled with confusion. They shall not only fall, but fall in their iniquity, the saddest fall of any. Their pride kept them from repenting of their iniquity,



and therefore they shall fall in it. Note, Those that are not humbled for their sins are likely to perish for ever in their sins. It is added, *Judah also shall fall with them* in her iniquity. As the ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria, for their idolatry, so the two tribes, in process of time, were carried into Babylon for following their bad example; but the former fell and were utterly cast down, the latter fell and were raised up again. Judah had the temple and priesthood, and yet these shall not secure them, but, if they sin with Israel and Ephraim, with them they shall fall.

2. They shall fall short of God's favour when they profess to seek it (v. 6): *They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord*, but in vain; *they shall not find him*. This seems to be spoken principally of Judah, when they fell into their iniquity, and when they fell in their iniquity. (1.) When they fell into their iniquity they *sought the Lord*; but they did not *seek him only*, and therefore he was not *found of them*. When they worshipped strange gods, yet they kept up the show and shadow of the worship of the true God; they went as usual, at the solemn feasts, *with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord*; but their hearts were not *upright with him*, because they were not *entire for him*, and therefore he would not accept them; for *then only shall we find him when we seek him with our whole heart*, not divided between God and Baal, Ezek. xiv. 3. (2.) When they fell in their iniquity, or found themselves falling by it, they *sought the Lord*; but they did not seek him *early*, and therefore he will not be found of them. They shall see ruin coming upon them, and shall then, in their distress, flee to God, and think to make him their friend with burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but it will be too late then to turn away his wrath when *the decree has gone forth*. Even Josiah's reformation did not prevail to *turn away the wrath of God*, 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26. Those that go *with their flocks and their herds only* to seek the Lord, and not with their hearts and souls, cannot expect to find him, for his favour is not to be purchased with *thousands of rams*. Nor shall those speed who do not seek the Lord *while he may be found*, for there is a time when he will not be found. They shall not find him, for he has withdrawn himself; he will not be enquired of by them, but will turn a deaf ear to their prayers and have no regard to their sacrifices. See how much it is our concern to seek God early, now while the accepted time is, and the day of salvation.

3. They and their portions shall all be swallowed up. They have *dealt treacherously against the Lord*, and have thought to strengthen themselves in it by their alliances with strange children; but *now shall a month devour them with their portions*, that is, their estates and inheritances all those things

which they have taken, and taken up with, as their portion; or by their *portions* is meant their idols, whom they those for their portion instead of God. Note, Those that make an idol of the world, by taking it for their portion, will themselves perish with it. *A month shall devour them, or eat them up*—a certain time prefixed, and a short time. When God's judgments begin with them they shall soon make an end; one month will do their business. How much may a body be weakened by one month's sickness, or a kingdom wasted by one month's war! *Three shepherds* (says God) *I cut off in one month*, Zech. xi. 8. Note, The judgments of God sometimes make quick work with a sinful people. A month devours more, and more portions, than many years can repair.

8 Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud at Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin. 9 Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be. 10 The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: *therefore* I will pour out my wrath upon them like water. 11 Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment. 12 *Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth*, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. 13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah *saw* his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound. 14 For *I will be unto Ephraim as a lion*, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: *I, even I*, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. 15 *I will go and return to my place*, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

Here is, I. A loud alarm sounded, giving notice of judgments coming (v. 8): *Blow you the cornet in Gibeah and in Ramah*, two cities near together in the confines of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, Gibeah a frontier-town of the kingdom of Judah, Ramah of Israel; so that the warning is hereby sent into both kingdoms. "*Cry aloud at Beth-aven*, or Bethel, which place seems to be already seized upon by the enemy, and therefore the trumpet is not sounded there, but you hear the outcries of those that shout for mastery, mixed with theirs that are over-

come." Let them cry aloud, "*After thee, O Benjamin!*" comes the enemy. The tribe of Ephraim is already vanquished, and the enemy will be upon thy back, O Benjamin! in a little time; thy turn comes next. The cup of trembling shall go round." The prophet had described God's controversy with them as a trial at law (*ch. iv. 1*); here he describes it as a trial by battle; and here also *when he judges he will overcome*. Let all therefore prepare to meet their God. He had before spoken of the judgments as certain; here he speaks of them as near; and, when they are apprehended as just at the door, they are very startling and awakening. The blowing of this cornet is explained, *v. 9. Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be*, that which is true or certain, so the word is. Note, The destruction of impenitent sinners is a thing which shall surely be; it is not mere talk, to frighten them, but it is an irrevocable sentence. And it is a mercy to us that it is made known to us, that we have timely warning given us of it, that we may flee from the wrath to come. It is the privilege of the tribes of Israel that, as they are told their duty, so they are told their danger, by the oracles of God committed to them.

II. The ground of God's controversy with them. 1. He has a quarrel with the *princes of Judah*, because they were daring leaders in sin, *v. 10*. They are like those that remove the bound, or the ancient land-marks. God has given them his law, to be a fence about his own property; but they have sacrilegiously broken through it, and set it aside; they have encroached even upon God's rights, have trampled upon the distinctions between good and evil, and the most sacred obligations of reason and equity, thinking, because they were princes, that they might do any thing, *Quicquid libet, licet—Their will was a law*. Or it may be understood of their invading the liberty and property of the subject for the advancing of the prerogative, which was like removing the ancient land-marks. Some have observed that the princes of Judah were more absolute, and assumed a more arbitrary power, than the princes of Israel did; now, for this, God has a controversy with them: *I will pour out my wrath upon them like water*, in great abundance, like the waters of the flood, which were poured upon the *giants of the old world*, for the violence which the earth was filled with through them, *Gen. vi. 13*. Note, There are bounds which even princes themselves must not remove, bounds both of religion and justice, which they are limited by, and, if they break through them, they must know that there is a God above them that will call them to account for it. 2. He has a quarrel with the *people of Ephraim*, because they were sneaking followers in sin (*v. 11*): *He willingly walked after the commandment*, that is, the commandment of Jeroboam and the

succeeding kings of Israel, who obliged all their subjects by a law to worship the calves at Dan and Bethel, and never to go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was the commandment; it was the law of the land, and backed with reasons of state; and the people not only walked after it in a blind implicit obedience to authority, but they willingly walked after it, from a secret antipathy they had to the worship of God and a strong bias to the worship of idols. Note, An easy compliance with the commandments of men that thwart the commandments of God ripens a people for ruin as much as any thing. And the punishment of the sequacious disobedience (if I may so call it) answers to the sin; for it is for this that *Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment*, has all his civil rights and liberties broken in upon and trodden down; and, (1.) It is just with God that it should be so, that those who betray God's property should lose their own, that those who subject their consciences to an infallible judge, and an arbitrary power, should have enough of both. (2.) There is a natural tendency in the thing itself towards it. Those that willingly walk after the commandment, even when it walks contrary to the command of God, will find the commandment an encroaching thing, and that the more power is given it the more it will claim. Note, Nothing gives greater advantage to a mastiff-like tyranny, that is fierce and furious, than a spaniel-like submission, that is fawning and flattering. Thus is *Ephraim oppressed and broken in judgment*, that is, he is wronged under a face and colour of right. Note, It is a sad and sore judgment upon any people to be oppressed under pretence of having justice done them. This explains the threatening *v. 9, Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke*. Note, Daring sinners must expect that a day of rebuke will come, and such a day of rebuke as will make them desolate, will deprive them of the comfort of all they have and all they hope for.

III. The different methods that God would take both with Judah and Ephraim, sometimes one method and sometimes the other, and sometimes both together, or rather by which, first the one and then the other, he would advance towards their complete ruin.

1. He would begin with less judgments, which should sometimes work silently and insensibly (*v. 12*): *I will be (that is, my providences shall be) unto Ephraim as a moth*; nay (as it might better be supplied), *they are unto Ephraim as a moth*, for it is such a sickness as Ephraim now sees, *v. 13*. Note, The judgments of God are sometimes to a sinful people as a moth, and as rottenness, or as a worm. The former signifies the little animals that breed in clothes, the latter those that breed in wood; as these consume the clothes and the wood, so shall the judgments of God consume them. (1.) Silently, so as not to make any noise in the world,



may, so as they themselves shall not be sensible of it; they shall think themselves safe and thriving, but, when they come to look more narrowly into their state, shall find themselves wasting and decaying. (2.) Slowly, and with long delays and intervals, that he may give them *space to repent*. Many a nation, as well as many a person, in the prime of its time, dies of a consumption. (3.) Gradually. God comes upon sinners with less judgments, so to prevent greater, if they will be wise and take warning; he comes upon them step by step, to show he is not willing that they should perish. (4.) The moth breeds in the clothes, and the worm or rottenness in the wood; thus sinners are consumed by a fire of their own kindling.

2. When it appeared that those had not done their work he would come upon them with greater (v. 14): *I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and to the house of Judah as a young lion*, though Judah is himself, in Jacob's blessing, a *lion's whelp*. Lest any should think his power weakened, because he was said to be *as a moth* to them, he says that he will now be *as a lion* to them, not only to frighten them with his roaring, but to pull them to pieces. Note, If less judgments prevail not to do their work, it may be expected that God will send greater. *Christ* is sometimes a lion of the tribe of Judah, here he is a lion against that tribe. See what God will do to a people that are secure in sin: *Even I will tear*. He seems to glory in it, as his prerogative, to be able to *destroy*, as the *alone lawgiver*, Jam. iv. 12. "*I, even I, will take the work into my own hands; I say it that will do it.*" There is a more immediate work of God in some judgments than in others. *I will tear, and go away*. He will go away, (1.) As not fearing them; he will go away in state, and with a majestic face, as the lion from his prey. (2.) As not helping them. If God tear by afflicting providences, and yet by his graces and comforts stays with us, it is well enough; but our condition is sad indeed if he *tear and go away*, if, when he deprives us of our creature comforts, he does himself depart from us. When he goes away he will take away all that is valuable and dear, for, when God goes, all good goes along with him. He will take away, *and none shall rescue him*, as the prey cannot be rescued from the lion, Mic. v. 8. Note, None can be delivered out of the hands of God's justice but those that are delivered into the hands of his grace. It is in vain for a man to strive with his Maker.

IV. The different effects of those different methods. 1. When God contended with them by less judgments they neglected him, and sought to creatures for relief, but sought in vain, v. 13. When God was to them *as a moth*, and as *rottenness*, they perceived *their sickness and their wound*; after a while they found themselves going down the hill, and that they

were behind-hand in their affairs, their estate was sensibly decaying, and then they sent *to the Assyrian*, to come in to their assistance, made their court to king Jareb, which, some think, was one of the names of Pul, or Tiglathpileser, kings of Assyria, to whom both Israel and Judah applied for relief in their distress, hoping by an alliance with them to repair and re-establish their declining interests. Note, Carnal hearts, in time of trouble, see their sickness and see their wound, but do not see the sin that is the cause of it, nor will be brought to acknowledge that, no, nor to acknowledge the hand of God, his *mighty hand*, much less his righteous hand, in their trouble; and therefore, instead of going the next way to the Creator, who could relieve them, they take a great deal of pains to go about to creatures, who can do them no service. Those who repent not that they have offended God by their sins are loth to be beholden to him in their afflictions, but would rather seek relief any where than with him. And what is the consequence? *Yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound*. Note, Those who neglect God, and seek to creatures for help, will certainly be disappointed; those who depend upon them for support will find them, not *foundations*, but *broken reeds*; those who depend upon them for supply will find them, not *fountains*, but *broken cisterns*; those who depend upon them for comfort and a cure will find them *miserable comforters*, and *physicians of no value*. The kings of Assyria, whom Judah and Israel sought unto, *distressed them and helped them not*, 2 Chron. xxviii. 16, 28. Some make king Jareb to signify the *great, potent, or magnificent king*, for they built much upon his power; others the *king that will plead*, or *should plead*, for they built much upon his wisdom and eloquence, and in his interesting himself in their affairs. They had sent him *a present* (ch. x. 6), a good fee, and, having so retained him of counsel for them, they doubted not of his fidelity to them; but he deceived them, as an arm of flesh does those that trust in it, Jer. xvii. 5, 6. 2. When, to convince them of their folly, God brought greater judgments upon them, then they would at length be forced to apply to him, v. 15. When he has *torn as a lion*, (1.) He will leave them: *I will go and return to my place*, to heaven, or to the mercy-seat, the throne of grace, which is his glory. When God punishes sinners he *comes out of his place* (Isa. xxvi. 21); but, when he designs them favour, he *returns to his place*, where he *waits to be gracious*, upon their submission. Or he will *return to his place* when he has corrected them, as not regarding them, hiding his face from them, and not taking notice of their troubles or prayers; and this for their further humiliation, till they are qualified in some measure for the returns of his favour. (2.) He will



at length work upon them, and bring them home to himself, by their afflictions, which is the thing he waits for; and then he will no longer withdraw from them. Two things are here mentioned as instances of their return:—[1.] Their penitent confession of sin: *Till they acknowledge their offence*; marg. *Till they be guilty*, that is, till they be sensible of their guilt, and be brought to own it, and humble themselves before God for it. Note, When men begin to complain more of their sins than of their afflictions then there begins to be some hope of them; and this is that which God requires of us, when we are under his correcting hand, that we own ourselves in a fault and justly corrected.

[2.] Their humble petition for the favour of God: *Till they seek my face*, which, it may be expected, they will do when they are brought to the last extremity, and they have tried other helpers in vain. *In their affliction they will seek me early*, that is, diligently and earnestly, and with great importunity; and if they seek him thus, and be sincere in it, though it might be called seeking him late, because it was long ere they were brought to it, yet it is not too late, nay, he is pleased to call it seeking him early, so willing is he to make the best of true penitents in their return to him. Note, When we are under the convictions of sin, and the corrections of the rod, our business is to seek God's face; we must desire the knowledge of him, and an acquaintance with him, that he may manifest himself to us, and for us, in token of his being at peace with us. And it may reasonably be expected that affliction will bring those to God that had long gone astray from him, and kept at a distance. *Therefore* God for a time turns away from us, that he may turn us to himself, and then return to us. *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.*

## CHAP. VI.

The closing words of the foregoing chapter gave us some hopes that God and his Israel, notwithstanding their sins and his wrath, might yet be happily brought together again, that they would seek him and he would be found of them; now this chapter carries that matter further, and somejoin the beginning of this chapter with the end of that, "They will seek me early," saying, "Come and let us return." But God doth again complain of the wickedness of this people; for, though some did repent and reform, the greater part continued obstinate. Observe, I. Their resolution to return to God, and the comforts wherewith they encourage themselves in their return, ver. 1—3. II. The instability of many of them in their professions and promises of repentance, and the severe course which God therefore took with them, ver. 4, 5. III. The covenant God made with them, and his expectations from them (ver. 6); their violation of that covenant and frustrating those expectations, ver. 7—11.

**C**OME, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. 2 After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. 3 Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the

morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

These may be taken either as the words of the prophet to the people, calling them to repentance, or as the words of the people to one another, exciting and encouraging one another to *seek the Lord*, and to humble themselves before him, in hopes of finding mercy with him. God had said, *In their affliction they will seek me*; now the prophet, and the good people his friends, would strike while the iron was hot, and set in with the convictions their neighbours seemed to be under. Note, Those who are disposed to turn to God themselves should do all they can to excite, and engage, and encourage others to return to him. Observe,

I. What it is they engage to do: "*Come, and let us return to the Lord*, v. 1. Let us go no more to the Assyrian, nor send to king Jareb; we have had enough of that. But let us *return to the Lord*, return to the worship of him from our idolatries; and to our hope in him from all our confidences in the creature." Note, It is the great concern of those who have revolted from God to return to him. And those who have gone from him by consent, and in a body, drawing one another to sin, should by consent, and in a body, return to him, which will be for his glory and their mutual edification.

II. What inducements and encouragements to do this they fasten upon, to stir up one another with.

1. The experience they had had of his displeasure: "*Let us return to him, for he has torn, he has smitten.*" We have been torn, and it was he that tore us; we have been smitten, and it was he that smote us. *Therefore* let us return to him, because it is for our revolts from him that he has torn and smitten us in anger, and we cannot expect that he should be reconciled to us till we return to him; and for this end he has afflicted us thus, that we might be wrought upon to return to him. His hand will be stretched out still against us if the people *turn not to him that smites them*," Isa. ix. 12, 13. Note, The consideration of the judgments of God upon us and our land, especially when they are tearing judgments, should awaken us to return to God by repentance, and prayer, and reformation.

2. The expectation they had of his favour: "*He that has torn will heal us*, he that has smitten will *bind us up*," as the skilful surgeon with a tender hand binds up the broken bone or bleeding wound. Note, The same providence of God that afflicts his people relieves them, and the same Spirit of God that convinces the saints comforts them; that which is first a *Spirit of bondage* is afterwards a *Spirit of adoption*. This is an acknowledgment of the power of God (he can heal though we be ever so ill torn), and



of his mercy (he will do it); nay, *therefore* he has torn that he may heal. Some think this points particularly to the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when they sought the Lord, and joined themselves to him, in the prospect of his gracious return to them in a way of mercy. Note, It will be of great use to us, both for our support under our afflictions and for our encouragement in our repentance, to keep up good thoughts of God and of his purposes and designs concerning us. Now this favour of God which they are here in expectation of is described in several instances:—

(1.) They promise themselves that their deliverance out of their troubles should be to them as *life from the dead* (v. 2): “*After two days he will revive us* (that is, in a short time, in a day or two), *and the third day, when it is expected that the dead body should putrefy and corrupt, and be buried out of our sight, then will he raise us up, and we shall live in his sight, we shall see his face with comfort and it shall be reviving to us. Though he forsake for a small moment, he will gather with everlasting kindness.*” Note, The people of God may not only be torn and smitten, but left for dead, and may lie so a great while; but they shall not always lie so, nor shall they long lie so; God will in a little time revive them; and the assurance given them of this should engage them to return and adhere to him. But this seems to have a further reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the time limited is expressed by *two days* and *the third day*, that it may be a type and figure of Christ’s rising the *third day*, which he is said to do according to the scriptures, according to this scripture; for all the prophets testified of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Let us see and admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in ordering the prophet’s words so that when he foretold the deliverance of the church out of her troubles he should at the same time point out our salvation by Christ, which other salvations were both figures and fruits of; and, though they might not be aware of this mystery in the words, yet now that they are fulfilled in the letter of them in the resurrection of Christ it is a confirmation to our faith that *this is he that should come*, and we are to *look for no other*. And it is every way suitable that a prophecy of Christ’s rising should be thus expressed, “*He will raise us up, and we shall live,*” for Christ rose as the first-fruits, and we revive with him, we live through him; he rose for our justification, and all believers are said to be *risen with Christ*. See Isa. xxvi. 19. And it would serve for a comfort to the church then, and an assurance that God would raise them out of their low estate, for in his fulness of time he would raise his Son from the grave, who would be the life and glory of his people Israel. Note, A regard by faith to a rising

Christ is a great support to a suffering Christian, and gives abundant encouragement to a repenting returning sinner; for he has said, *Because I live, you shall live also*.

(2.) That then they shall improve in the knowledge of God (v. 3): *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know, the Lord*. Then, when God returns in mercy to his people and designs favour for them, he will, as a pledge and fruit of his favour, give them more of the knowledge of himself; the earth shall be full of that knowledge, Isa. xi. 9. *Knowledge shall be increased*, Dan. xii. 4. *All shall know God*, Jer. xxxi. 34. *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord* (so the words are); and it may be taken as the fruit of Christ’s resurrection, and the life we live in God’s sight by him, that we shall have not only greater means of knowledge, but grace to improve in knowledge by those means. Note, When God designs mercy for a people he gives them a heart to know him, Jer. xxiv. 7. Those that have *risen with Christ* have the spirit of wisdom and revelation given them. And if we understand our living in his sight, as the Chaldee paraphrast does, of the day of the resurrection of the dead, it fitly follows, *We shall know, we shall follow to know, the Lord*; for in that day we shall see him as he is, and our knowledge of him shall be perfected, and yet be eternally increasing. Or, taking it as we read it, *If we follow on to know*, we have here, [1.] A precious blessing promised: *Then shall we know, shall know the Lord*, then when we return to God; those that come to God shall be brought into an acquaintance with him. When we are designed to *live in his sight*, then he gives us to know him; for this is *life eternal to know God*, John xvii. 3. [2.] The way and means of obtaining this blessing. We must *follow on to know him*. We must value and esteem the knowledge of God as the best knowledge, we must *cry after it, and dig for it* (Prov. ii. 3, 4), must *seek and intermeddle with all wisdom* (Prov. xviii. 1), and must proceed in our enquiries after this knowledge and our endeavours to improve in it. And, if we do the prescribed duty, we have reason to expect the promised mercy, that we shall know more and more of God, and be at last perfect in this knowledge.

(3.) That then they shall abound in divine consolations: *His going forth is prepared as the morning*, that is, the returns of his favour, which he had withdrawn from us when he went and *returned to his place*. His outgoings again are prepared and secured to us as firmly as the return of the morning after a dark night, and we expect it, as those do that *wait for the morning* after a long night, and are sure that it will come at the time appointed and will not fail; and the light of his countenance will be both welcome to us and growing upon us, unto the perfect day,

as the light of the morning is. *He shall come to us*, and be welcome to us, *as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth*, which refreshes it and makes it fruitful. Now this looks further than their deliverance out of captivity, and, no doubt, was to have its full accomplishment in Christ, and the grace of the gospel. The Old-Testament saints followed on to know him, earnestly looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and at length the out-goings of divine grace in him, in his going forth to visit this world, were [1.] As the morning to this earth when it is dark; for he went forth as the *sun of righteousness*, and in him the *day-spring from on high visited us*. His going forth was prepared as the morning, for he came in the fullness of time; John Baptist was his fore-runner, nay, he was himself the *bright and morning star*. [2.] As the rain to this earth when it is dry. *He shall come down as the rain upon the mown grass*, Ps. lxxii. 6. In him showers of blessings descend upon this world, which give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, Isa. lv. 10. And the favour of God in Christ is what is said of the king's favour, *like the cloud of the latter rain*, Prov. xvi. 15. The grace of God in Christ is both the *latter and the former rain*, for by it the good work of our fruit-bearing is both begun and carried on.

4 O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. 5 Therefore have I hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. 6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings. 7 But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me. 8 Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood. 9 And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness. 10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled. 11 Also, O Judah, he hath set a harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

Two things, two evil things, both Judah and Ephraim are here charged with, and justly accused of:—

I. That they were not firm to their own convictions, but were unsteady, *unstable as*

*water*, v. 4, 5. O Ephraim! what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee? This is a strange expression. Can Infinite Wisdom be at a loss what to do? Can it be nonplussed, or put upon taking new measures? By no means; but God speaks after the manner of men, to show how absurd and unreasonable they were, and how just his proceedings against them were. Let them not complain of him as harsh and severe in tearing them, and smiting them, as he has done; for what else should he do? What other course could he take with them? God had tried various methods with them (*What could have been done more to his vineyard than he had done?* Isa. v. 4), and very loth he was to let things go to extremity; he reasons with himself (as ch. xi. 9), *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* God would have done them good, but they were not qualified for it: "*What shall I do unto thee?*" What else can I do but cast thee off, when I cannot in honour save thee?" Note, God never destroys sinners till he sees there is no other way with them. See here, 1. What their conduct was towards God: *Their goodness, or kindness, was as the morning cloud*. Some understand it of their kindness to themselves and their own souls, in their repentance; it is indeed mercy to ourselves to repent of our sins, but they soon retracted that kindness to themselves, undid it again, and wronged their own souls as much as ever. But it is rather to be taken for their piety and religion; what good appeared in them sometimes, it soon vanished and disappeared again, *as the morning cloud and the early dew*. Such was the goodness of Israel in Jehu's time, and of Judah in Hezekiah's and Josiah's time; it was soon gone. In time of drought the *morning-cloud* promises rain, and the *early dew* is some present refreshment to the earth; but the cloud is dispersed (and hypocrites are compared to *clouds without water*, Jude 12) and the dew does not soak into the ground, but is drawn back again into the air, and the earth is parched still. What shall he do with them? Shall he accept their goodness? No, for it *passes away*; and *factum non dicitur quod non perseverat*—that which does not continue can scarcely be said to be done. Note, That goodness will never be either pleasing to God or profitable to ourselves which is as the morning cloud and the early dew. When men promise fair and do not perform, when they begin well in religion and do not hold on, when they leave their first love and their first works, or, though they do not quite cast off religion, are yet unsteady, uneven, and inconstant in it, then is their *goodness as the morning cloud and the early dew*. 2. What course God had taken with them (v. 5): "*Therefore, because they were so rough and ill-shapen, I have hewn them by the prophets*, as timber or stone is hewn for use: *I have slain them by the words of my*



mouth." What the prophets did was done by the word of God in their mouths, which never returned void. By it they thought themselves slain, were ready to say that the prophets killed them, or cut them to the heart when they dealt faithfully with them. (1.) The prophets hewed them by convictions of sin, endeavouring to cut off their transgressions from them. They were uneven in religion (v. 4), therefore God hewed them. The hearts of sinners are not only as stone, but as rough stone, which requires a great deal of pains to bring it into shape, or as knotty timber, that is not squared without a great deal of difficulty; ministers' work is to hew them, and God by the minister hews them, *for with the froward will he show himself froward*. And there are those whom ministers must rebuke sharply; every word should cut, and though the chips fly in the face of the workman, though the reprov'd fly in the face of the reprov'er and reckon him an enemy because he tells the truth, yet he goes on with his work. (2.) They slew them by the denunciations of wrath, foretelling that they should be slain, as Ezekiel is said to destroy the city when he prophesied of the destruction of it, Ezek. xliii. 3. And God accomplished that which was foretold: "*I have slain them by my judgments, according to the words of my mouth.*" Note, The word of God will be the death either of the sin or of the sinner, a savour either of life unto life or of death unto death. Some read it, "*I have hewn the prophets, and slain them by the words of my mouth*, that is, I have employed them in laborious service for the people's good, which has wasted their strength; they have spent themselves, and hewn away all their spirits, in their work, and in hazardous service, which has cost many of them their lives." Note, Ministers are the tools which God makes use of in working upon people; and, though with many they labour in vain, yet God will reckon for the wearing out of his tools. (3.) God was hereby justified in the severest proceedings against them afterwards. His prophets had taken a great deal of pains with them, had admonished them of their sin and warned them of their danger, but the means used had not the desired effect; some good impressions perhaps were made for the present, but they wore off, and passed away as the morning cloud, and now they cannot charge God with severity if he bring upon them the miseries threatened. The prophet turns to him and acknowledges, *Thy judgments are as the light that goes forth*, evidently just and righteous. Note, Though sinners be not reclaimed by the pains that ministers take with them, yet thereby God will be justified *when he speaks and clear when he judges*. See Matt. xi. 17—19.

II. That they were not faithful to God's covenant with them, v. 6, 7. Here observe,

1. What the covenant was that God made with them, and upon what terms they should obtain his favour and be accepted of him (v. 6): *I desired mercy and not sacrifice* (that is, rather than sacrifice), and insisted upon the *knowledge of God more than upon burnt-offerings*. Mercy here is the same word which in v. 4 is rendered *goodness*—*chesed*—*piety, sanctity*; it is put for all practical religion; it is the same with *charity* in the New Testament, the reigning love of God and our neighbour, and this accompanied with and flowing from the *knowledge of God*, as he has revealed himself in his word, a firm belief that he is, and is the *rewarder of those that diligently seek him*, a good affection to divine things guided by a good judgment, which cannot but produce a very good conversation; this is that which God by his covenant requires, and *not sacrifice and offering*. This is fully explained, Jer. vii. 22, 23. *I spoke not to your fathers concerning burnt-offerings* (that was the smallest of the matters I spoke to them of, and on which the least stress was laid), but *this I said, Obey my voice*, Mic. vi. 6—8. To love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt-offering and sacrifice*, Mark xii. 33; Ps. li. 16, 17. Not but that sacrifice and offering were required, and to be paid, and had their use, and, when they were accompanied with mercy and the knowledge of God, were acceptable to him, but, without them, God regarded them not, he despised them, Isa. i. 10, 11. Perhaps this is mentioned here to show a difference between the God whom they deserted and the gods whom they went over to. The true God aimed at nothing but that they should be good men, and live good lives for their own good, and the ceremony of honouring him with sacrifices was one of the smallest matters of his law; whereas the false gods required that only; let their priests and altars be regaled with sacrifices and offerings, and the people might live as they listed. What fools were those then that left a God who aimed at giving his worshippers a new nature, for gods who aimed at nothing but making themselves a new name! It is mentioned likewise to show that God's controversy with them was not for the omission of sacrifices (*I will not reprove thee for them*, Ps. l. 8), but because there was no *justice, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God*, among them (ch. iv. 1), and to teach us all that the *power of godliness* is the main thing God looks at and requires, and without it the *form of godliness* is of no avail. Serious piety in the heart and life is the *one thing needful*, and, separate from that, the performances of devotion, though ever so plausible, ever so costly, are of no account. Our Saviour quotes this to show that moral duties are to be preferred before rituals whenever they come in competition, and to justify himself in *eating with publicans and sinners*, because it was in mercy to the souls of men, and in healing on the



sabbath day, because it was in mercy to the bodies of men, to which the ceremony of singularity in eating and the sabbath-rest must give way, Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7.

2. How little they had regarded this covenant, though it was so well ordered in all things, though they, and not God, would be the gainers by it. See here what came of it.

(1.) In general, they broke with God, and proved unfaithful; there were *good things committed* to them to keep, the jewels of mercy and piety, and the knowledge of God, in the cabinet of sacrifice and burnt-offering, but they betrayed their trust, kept the cabinet, but pawned the jewels for the gratification of a base lust, and this is that for which God has justly a quarrel with them (v. 7): *They, like men, have transgressed the covenant, that covenant which God made with them; they have broken the conditions of it, and so forfeited the benefit of it.* By casting off mercy and the knowledge of God, and other instances of disobedience, [1.] They had contracted the guilt of perjury and covenant-breaking; they were like men that transgress a covenant by which they had solemnly bound themselves, which is a thing that all the world cries out shame on; men that have done so deserve not again to be valued, or trusted, or dealt with. "*There, in that thing, they have dealt treacherously against me; they have been perfidious, base, and false children, in whom is no faith, though I depended upon their being children that would not lie.*" [2.] In this they had but acted like themselves, *like men*, who are generally false and fickle, and in whose nature (their corrupt nature) it is to deal treacherously; *all men are liars*, and they are like the rest of that degenerate race, *all gone aside*, Ps. xiv. 2, 3. They have *transgressed the covenant like men* (like the Gentiles that transgressed the covenant of nature), like *mean men* (the word here used is sometimes put for *men of low degree*); they have dealt deceitfully, like base men that have no sense of honour. [3.] Herein they trod in the steps of our first parents: *They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant* (so it might very well be read); as he transgressed the covenant of innocence, so they transgressed the covenant of grace, so treacherously, so foolishly; *there in paradise he violated his engagements to God, and there in Canaan, another paradise, they violated their engagements.* And by their treacherous dealing they, like Adam, have ruined themselves and theirs. Note, Sin is so much the worse the more there is in it of the *similitude of Adam's transgression*, Rom. v. 14. [4.] Low thoughts of God and of his authority and favour were at the bottom of all this; for so some read it: *They have transgressed the covenant, as of a man*, as if it had been but the covenant of a man, that stood upon even ground with them, as if the commands of the covenant were but like those

of a man like themselves, and the kindness conveyed by it no more valuable than that of a man. There is something sacred and binding in *a man's covenant* (as the apostle shows, Gal. iii. 15), but much more in the covenant of God, which yet they made small account of; and *there in that covenant they dealt treacherously*, promised fair, but performed nothing. Dealing treacherously with God is here called dealing treacherously against him, for it is both an affront and an opposition. Deserters are traitors, and will be so treated; the revolting heart is a rebellious heart.

(2.) Some particular instances of their treachery are here given: *There they dealt treacherously*, that is, in the places hereafter named. [1.] Look on the other side Jordan, to the country which lay most exposed to the insults of the neighbouring nations, and where therefore the people were concerned to keep themselves under the divine protection, and yet there you will find the most daring provocations of the divine Majesty, v. 8. Gilead, which lay in the lot of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, was a *city of the workers of iniquity*. Wickedness was the trade that was driven there; the country was called *Gilead*, but it was all called a *city*, because they were all as it were incorporated in one society of rebels against God. Or (as most think) Ramoth Gilead is the city here meant, one of the three cities of refuge on the other side Jordan, and a Levites' city; the inhabitants of it, though of the sacred tribe, were *workers of iniquity*, contrived it, and practised it. Note, It is bad indeed when a Levites' city is a *city of those that work iniquity*, when those that are to preach good doctrine live bad lives. Particularly it is *polluted with blood*, as if that were a sin which the wicked Levites were in a special manner guilty of. In popish countries the clergy are observed to be the most bloody persecutors. Or, as it was a *city of refuge*, by abusing the power it had to judge of murders it became *polluted with blood*. They would, for a bribe, protect those that were guilty of wilful murder, whom they ought to have put to death, and would deliver those to the avenger of blood who were guilty but of chance-medley, if they were poor and had nothing to give them; and both these ways they were *polluted with blood*. Note, Blood defiles the land where it is shed, and where no inquisition is made or no vengeance taken for it. See how the best institutions, that are ever so well designed to keep the balance even between justice and mercy, are capable of being abused and perverted to the manifest prejudice and violation of both. [2.] Look among those whose business it was to minister in holy things, and they were as bad as the worst and as vile as the vilest (v. 9): *The company of priests* are so, not here and there one that is the scandal of his order, but the whole order and body of them, the *priests* go all one way *by consent, with*



one shoulder (as the word is), one and all; and they make one another worse, more daring, and fierce, and impudent, in sin, more crafty and more cruel. A company of priests will say and do that in conspiracy which none of them would dare to say or do singly. The companies of priests were as troops of robbers, as banditti, or gangs of highwaymen, that cut men's throats to get their money. *First*, They were cruel and blood-thirsty. They murder those that they have a pique against, or that stand in their way; nothing less will satisfy them. *Secondly*, They were cunning. They laid wait for men, that they might have a fair opportunity to compass their mischievous malicious designs; thus the company of priests laid wait for Christ to take him, saying, *Not on the feast-day*. *Thirdly*, They were concurring as one man: *They murder in the way*; in the highway, where travellers should be safe, there they murder by consent, aiding and abetting one another in it. See how unanimous wicked people are in doing mischief; and should not good people be so then in doing good? *They murder in the way to Shechem* (so the margin reads it, as a proper name) such as were going to Jerusalem (for that way Shechem lay) to worship. Or *in the way to Shechem* (some think) means in the same manner that their father Levi, with Simeon his brother, murdered the Shechemites (Gen. xxxiv.), by fraud and deceit; and some understand it of their destroying the souls of men by drawing them to sin. *Fourthly*, They did it with contrivance: *They commit lewdness*; the word signifies such wickedness as is committed with deliberation, and of malice prepense, as we say. The more there is of device and design in sin the worse it is. [3.] Look into the body of the people, take a view of the whole house of Israel, and they are all alike (v. 10): *I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel*, and, though it be ever so artfully managed, God discovers it, and will discover it to them; and who can deny that which God himself says that he has seen? *There is the whoredom of Ephraim*, both corporal and spiritual whoredom; there it is too plain to be denied. Note, The sin of sinners, especially sinners of the house of Israel, has enough in it to make them tremble, for it is a horrible thing, it is amazing, and it is threatening, enough to make them blush, for Israel is thereby defiled and rendered odious in the sight of God. [4.] Look into Judah, and you find them sharing with Israel (v. 11): *Also, O Judah! he has set a harvest for thee*; thou must be reckoned with as well as Ephraim; thou art ripe for destruction too, and the time, even the set time, of thy destruction is hastening on, when thou that hast ploughed iniquity, and sown wickedness, shalt reap the same. The general judgment is compared to a harvest (Matt. xiii. 39), so are particular judgments,

Joel iii. 13; Rev. xiv. 15. I have appointed a time to call thee to account, even *when I returned the captivity of my people*, that is, when those captives of Judah which were taken by the men of Israel were restored, in obedience to the command of God sent them by Oded the prophet, 2 Chron. xxviii. 8—15. When God spared them that time he set them a harvest, that is, he designed to reckon with them another time for all together. Note, Preservations from present judgments, if a good use be not made of them, are but reservations for greater judgments.

#### CHAP. VII.

In this chapter we have, I. A general charge drawn up against Israel for those high crimes and misdemeanors by which they had obstructed the course of God's favours to them, ver. 1, 2. II. A particular accusation, 1. Of the court—the king, princes, and judges, ver. 3—7. 2. Of the country. Ephraim is here charged with conforming to the nations (ver. 8), senselessness and stupidity under the judgments of God (ver. 9—11), ingratitude to God for his mercies (ver. 13), incorrigibility under his judgments (ver. 14), contempt of God (ver. 15), and hypocrisy in their pretences to return to him, ver. 16. They are also threatened with a severe chastisement, which shall humble them (ver. 12), and, if that prevail not, then with an utter destruction (ver. 13), particularly their princes, ver. 16.

**W**HEN I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria: for they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without. 2 And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face. 3 They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. 4 They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened. 5 In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. 6 For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. 7 They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me.

Some take away the last words of the foregoing chapter, and make them the beginning of this: "*When I returned, or would have returned, the captivity of my people*, when I was about to come towards them in ways of mercy, even *when I would have healed Israel then the iniquity of Ephraim* (the

country and common people) *was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria, the court and the chief city.*" Now, in these verses, we may observe,

1. A general idea given of the present state of Israel, v. 1, 2. See how the case now stood with them.

1. God graciously designed to do well for them: *I would have healed Israel.* Israel were sick and wounded; their disease was dangerous and malignant, and likely to be fatal, Isa. i. 6. But God offered to be their physician, to undertake the cure, and there was balm in Gilead sufficient to recover the health of the daughter of his people; their case was bad, but it was not desperate, nay, it was hopeful, when God *would have healed Israel.* (1.) He would have reformed them, would have separated between them and their sins, would have purged out the corruptions that were among them, by his laws and prophets. (2.) He would have delivered them out of their troubles, and restored to them their peace and prosperity. Several healing attempts were made, and their declining state seemed sometimes to be in a hopeful way of recovery; but their own folly put them back again. Note, If sinful miserable souls be not healed and helped, but perish in their sin and misery, they cannot lay the blame on God, for he both could and *would have healed them*; he offered to take the ruin under his hand. And there are some special seasons when God manifests his readiness to heal a distempered church and nation, now and then a hopeful crisis, which, if carefully watched and improved, might, even when the case is very bad, turn the scale for life and health.

2. They stood in their own light and put a bar in their own door. When God *would have healed them*, when they bade fair for reformation and peace, then their *iniquity was discovered* and their *wickedness*, which stopped that current of God's favours, and undid all again. (1.) *Then*, when their case came to be examined and enquired into, in order to their cure, that wickedness which had been concealed and palliated was *found out*; not that it was ever hid from God, but he speaks after the manner of men; as a surgeon, when he probes a wound in order to the cure of it and finds that it touches the vitals and is incurable, goes no further in his endeavour to cure it, so, when God *came down to see* the case of Israel (as the expression is, Gen. xviii. 21), with kind intentions towards them, he found their wickedness so very flagrant, and them so hardened in it, so impudent and impenitent, that he could not in honour show them the favour he designed them. Note, Sinners are not healed because they would not be healed. Christ *would have gathered them*, and they *would not*. (2.) *Then*, when some endeavours were used to reform and reclaim them, that wickedness which had been restrained and kept

under broke out; and from God's steps towards the healing of them they took occasion to be so much the more provoking. When endeavours were used to reform them vice grew more impetuous, more outrageous, and swelled so much the higher, as a stream when it is dammed up. When they began to prosper they grew more proud, wanton, and secure, and so stopped the progress of their cure. Note, It is sin that turns away good things from us when they are coming towards us; and it is the folly and ruin of multitudes that, when God would do well for them, they do ill for themselves. And what was it that did them this mischief? In one word, *they commit falsehood*; they worship idols (so some), defraud one another (so others), or, rather, they dissemble with God in their professions of repentance and regard to him. They say that they are desirous to be healed by him, and, in order to that, willing to be ruled by him; but they *lie unto him with their mouth and flatter him with their tongue*.

3. A practical disbelief of God's omniscience and government was at the bottom of all their wickedness (v. 2): "*They consider not in their hearts*, they never say it to their own hearts, never think of this, *that I remember all their wickedness.*" As if God could not see it, though he is all eye, or did not heed it, though his name is Jealous, or had forgotten it, though he is an eternal mind that can never be unmindful, or would not reckon for it, though he is the *Judge of heaven and earth*. This is the sinner's atheism; as good say that there is *no God* as say that he is either ignorant or forgetful, that there is *none that judges in the earth* as that he remembers not the things he is to give judgment upon. It is a high affront they put upon God; it is a damning cheat they put upon themselves; they say, *The Lord shall not see*, Ps. xciv. 7. They cannot but know that *God remembers all their works*; they have been told it many a time; nay, if you ask them, they cannot but own it, and yet they do not *consider it*; they do not think of it when they should, and with application to themselves and their own works, else they would not, they durst not, do as they do. But the time will come when those who thus deceive themselves shall be undeceived: "*Now their own doings have beset them about*, that is, they have come at length to such a pitch of wickedness that their sins appear on every side of them; all their neighbours see how bad they are, and can they think that God does not see it?" Or, rather, "The punishment of their doings besets them about; they are surrounded and embarrassed with troubles, so that they cannot get out, by which it appears that the sins they smart for are *before my face*, not only that I have seen them, but that I am displeased at them;" for, till God by pardoning our sins has cast them behind his



back, they are still before his face. Note, Sooner or later, God will convince those who do not now consider it that he *remembers all their works*.

4. God had begun to contend with them by his judgments, in earnest of what was further coming: *The thief comes in, and the troop of robbers spoils without*. Some take this as an instance of their wickedness, that they robbed and spoiled one another. *Nec hospes ab hospite tutus—The host and the guest stand in fear of each other*. It seems rather to be a punishment of their sin; they were infested with secret thieves among themselves, that robbed their houses and shops and picked their pockets, and *troops of robbers*, foreign invaders, that with open violence *spoiled abroad*; so far was Israel from being healed that they had fresh wounds given them daily by robbers and spoilers; and all this the effect of sin, all to punish them for robbing God, Isa. xlii. 24; Mal. iii. 8, 11.

II. A particular account of the sins of the court, of the king and princes, and those about them, and the tokens of God's displeasure that they were under for them.

1. Their king and princes were pleased with the wickedness and profaneness of their subjects, who were emboldened thereby to be so much the more wicked (v. 3): *They make the king and princes glad with their wickedness*. It pleased them to see the people conform to their wicked laws and examples, in the worship of their idols, and other instances of impiety and immorality, and to hear them flatter and applaud them in their wicked ways. When Herod saw that his wickedness pleased the people he proceeded further in it, much more will the people do so when they see that it pleases the prince, Acts xii. 3. Particularly, they made them glad *with their lies*, with the lying praises with which they crowned the favourites of the prince and the lying calumnies and censures with which they blackened those whom they knew the princes had a dislike to. Those who show themselves pleased with slanders and ill-natured stories shall never want those about them who will fill their ears with such stories. Prov. xxix. 12, *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked*, and will make him glad with their lies.

2. Drunkenness and revelling abound much at the court, v. 5. *The day of our king* was a merry day with them, either his birth-day or his inauguration-day, of which it is probable that they had an anniversary observation, or perhaps it was some holiday of his appointing, which was therefore called *his day*; on that day the princes met to drink the king's health, and got him among them, to be merry, and *made him sick with bottles of wine*. It should seem the king did not ordinarily drink to excess, but he was now upon a high day brought to it by the artifices of the princes, tempted by

the goodness of the wine, the gaiety of the company, or the healths they urged; and so little was he used to it that it *made him sick*; and it is justly charged as a crime, as *crimen læsæ majestatis—treason*, upon those who thus imposed upon him and *made him sick*; nor would it serve for an excuse that it was the *day of their king*, but was rather an aggravation of the crime, that, when they pretended to do him honour, they dishonoured him to the highest degree. If it is a great affront and injury to a common person to make him drunk, and there is a woe to those that do it (Hab. ii. 15), much more to a crowned head; for the greater any man's dignity is the greater disgrace it is to him to be drunk. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel! it is not for kings, to drink wine*, Prov. xxxi. 4, 5. See what a prejudice the sin of drunkenness is to a man, to a king.

(1.) In his health; it *made him sick*. It is a force upon nature; and strange it is by what charms men, otherwise rational enough, can be drawn to that which besides the offence it gives to God, and the damage it does to their spiritual and eternal welfare, is a present disorder and distemper to their own bodies. (2.) In his honour; for, when he was thus intoxicated, he *stretched out his hand with scorn*; then he that was entrusted with the government of a kingdom lost the government of himself, and so far forgot, [1.] The dignity of a king that he made himself familiar with players and buffoons, and those whose company was a scandal. [2.] The duty of a king that he joined in confederacy with atheists, and the profane scoffers at religion, whom he ought to have silenced and put to shame; he *sat in the seat of the scornful*, of those that had arrived at the highest pitch of impiety; he struck in with them, said as they said, did as they did, and exerted his power, and *stretched forth the hand* of his government, in concurrence with them. Goodness and good men are often made *the song of the drunkards* (Ps. lxi. 12; xxxv. 16); but *woe unto thee, O land!* when *thy king is such a child* as to *stretch forth his hand* with those that make them so, Eccl. x. 16.

3. Adultery and uncleanness prevailed much among the courtiers. This is spoken of v. 4, 6, 7, and the charge of drunkenness comes in in the midst of this article; for wine is oil to the fire of lust, Prov. xxiii. 33. Those that are inflamed with fleshly lusts, that are *adulterers* (v. 4), are here again and again compared to an oven heated by the baker (v. 4): *They have made ready their heart like an oven* (v. 6); *they are all hot as an oven*, v. 7. Note, [1.] An unclean heart is like an oven heated; and the unclean lusts and affections of it are as the fuel that makes it hot. It is an inward fire, it keeps the heat within itself; so adulterers and fornicators secretly *burn in lust*, as the expression is, Rom. i. 27. The heat of the oven is an in-



tense heat, especially as it is here described; he that heats it *stirs up* the fire, and *ceases not from raising it up*, till the bread is ready to be put in, being *kneaded* and *leavened*, all which only signifies that they are like an oven when it is at the hottest; nay, when it is *too hot for the baker* (so the learned Dr. Po-cock), when it is *hotter than he would have it*, so that the raiser up of the fire ceases as long as while the dough that is kneaded is in the fermenting, that the heat may abate a little. Thus fiery hot are the lusts of an unclean heart. (2.) The unclean wait for an opportunity to compass their wicked desires; having made ready their heart like an oven, they lie in wait to catch their prey. *The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight*, Job xxiv. 15. *Their baker sleeps all the night, but in the morning it burns as a flaming fire*. As the baker, having kindled a fire in his oven and laid sufficient fuel to it, goes to bed, and sleeps all night, and in the morning finds his oven well heated, and ready for his purpose, so these wicked people, when they have laid some wicked plot, and formed a design for the gratifying of some covetous, ambitious, revengeful, or unclean lusts, have their hearts so fully set in them to do evil that, though they may stifle them for a while, yet the fire of corrupt affections is still glowing within, and, as soon as ever there is an opportunity for it, their purposes which they have compassed and imagined break out into overt acts, as a fire flames out when it has vent given it. Thus *they are all hot as an oven*. Note, Lust in the heart is like fire in an oven, puts it into a heat; but the day is coming when those who thus make themselves like a fiery oven with their own vile affections, if that fire be not extinguished by divine grace, shall be made as a fiery oven by divine wrath (Ps. xxi. 9), when *the day comes that shall burn as an oven*, Mal. iv. 1.

4. They resist the proper methods of reformation and redress: *They have devoured their judges*, those few good judges that were among them, that would have put out these fires with which they were heated; they fell foul upon them, and would not suffer them to do justice, but were ready to stone them, and perhaps did so; or, as some think, they provoked God to deprive them of the blessing of magistracy and to leave all in confusion: *All their kings have fallen* one after another, and their families with them, which could not but put the kingdom into confusion, crumble it into contending parties, and occasion a great deal of bloodshed. There are heart-burnings among them; they are *hot as an oven* with rage and malice at one another, and this occasions the *devouring of their judges*, the *falling of their kings*. *For the transgressions of a land many are the princes thereof*, Prov. xxviii. 2. But in the midst of all this trouble and disorder *there is none among them that calls unto God*, that sees

his hand stretched out against them in these judgments, and deprecates the strokes of it, none, or next to none, that stir up themselves to take hold on God, Isa. lxiv. 7. Note, Those are not only heated with sin, but hardened in sin, that continue to live without prayer even when they are in trouble and distress.

8 Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. 9 Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not. 10 And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this. 11 Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. 12 When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. 13 Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. 14 And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. 15 Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. 16 They return, but not to the Most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this *shall be* their derision in the land of Egypt.

Having seen how vicious and corrupt the court was, we now come to enquire how it is with the country, and we find that to be no better; and no marvel if the distemper that has so seized the head affect the whole body, so that there is *no soundness* in it; the *iniquity of Ephraim is discovered*, as well as the *sin of Samaria*, of the people as well as the princes, of which here are divers instances.

I. They were not peculiar and entire for God, as they should have been, v. 8. 1. They did not distinguish themselves from the heathen, as God had distinguished them: *Ephraim, he has mingled himself among the people*, has associated with them, and conformed himself to them, and has in a manner confounded himself with them and lost his



character among them. God had said, *The people shall dwell alone*; but they mingled themselves with the heathen and learned their works, Ps. cvi. 35. They went up and down among the heathen, to beg help of one of them against another (so some); whereas, if they had kept close to God, they would not have needed the help of any of them. 2. They were not entirely devoted to God: *Ephraim is a cake not turned*, and so is burnt on one side and dough on the other side, but good for nothing on either side. As in Ahab's time, so now, they halted between God and Baal; sometimes they seemed zealous for God, but at other times as hot for Baal. Note, It is sad to think how many, who, after a sort, profess religion, are made up of contraries and inconsistencies, as a cake not turned, a constant self-contradiction, and always in one extreme or the other.

II. They were strangely insensible of the judgments of God, which they were under, and which threatened their ruin, v. 9. Observe, 1. The condition they were in. God was now to them, in his judgments, as a moth and as rottenness; they were silently and slowly drawing towards the ruin of their state partly by the encroachments of foreigners upon them: *Strangers have devoured his strength*, and eaten him up; they have wasted his wealth and treasure, lessened his numbers, and consumed the fruits of the earth. Some devoured them by open wars (as 2 Kings xiii. 7, when the king of Syria made them like the dust by threshing), others by pretending treaties of peace and amity, in which they extorted abundance of wealth from them, and made them pay dearly for that which did them no good, but which afterwards they paid more dearly for, as 2 Kings xvi. 9. This Ephraim got by mingling with the heathen, and suffering them to mingle with him; they devoured that which he rested upon and supported himself with. Note, Those that make not God their strength (Ps. lii. 7) make that their strength which will soon be devoured by strangers. They were thus reduced partly by their own mal-administrations among themselves: *Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him* (are sprinkled upon him, so the word is), that is, the sad symptoms of a decaying declining state, which is waxing old and ready to vanish away, and the effects of trouble and vexation. *Cura facit canos*—Care turns gray. The almond-tree does not as yet flourish, but it begins to turn colour, which speaks aloud to him that the evil days are coming, and the years of which he shall say, *I have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. xii. 1, 5. 2. Their regardlessness of these warnings: *He knows it not*; he is not aware of the hand of God gone out against him; it is lifted up, but he will not see, Isa. xxvi. 11. He does not know how near his ruin is, and takes no care to prevent it. Note, Stupidity under less judgments is a presage of greater coming.

III. They went on frowardly in their wicked ways, and were not reclaimed by the rebukes they were under (v. 10): *The pride of Israel still testifies to his face*, as it had done before (ch. v. 5); under humbling providences their hearts were still unhumiliated, their lusts unmortified; and it is through the pride of their countenance that they will not seek after God (Ps. x. 4); they do not return to the Lord their God by repentance and reformation, nor do they seek him by faith and prayer for all this; though they suffer for going astray from him, though it can never be well with them till they come back to him, and though they have in vain sought to others for relief, yet they think not of applying to God.

IV. They were infatuated in their counsels, and took very wrong methods when they were in distress (v. 11, 12): *Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart*. To be harmless as a dove, without gall, and not to hurt or injure others, is commendable; but to be sottish as a dove, without heart, that knows not how to defend herself and provide for her own safety, is a shame.

1. The silliness of this dove is, (1.) That she laments not the loss of her young that are taken from her, but will make her nest again in the same place; so they have their people carried away by the enemy, and are not affected with it, but continue their dealings with those that deal barbarously with them. (2.) That she is easily enticed by the bait into the net, and has no heart, no understanding, to discern her danger, as many other fowls do, Prov. i. 17. She hastes to the snare, and knows not that it is for her life (Prov. vii. 23); so they were drawn into leagues with neighbouring nations that were their ruin. (3.) That, when she is frightened, she has not courage to stay in the dove-house, where she is safe, and under the careful protection of her owner, but flutters and hovers, seeking shelter first in one place, then in another, and thereby exposes herself so much the more; so this people, when they were in distress, sought not to God, did not fly like the doves to their windows, where they might have been secured from all the birds of prey that struck at them, but threw themselves out of God's protection, and then called to Egypt to help them, and went in all haste to Assyria, to seek for that aid in vain which they might, by repentance and prayer, have found nearer home, in their God. Note, It is a silly senseless thing for those who have a God in heaven to trust to creatures for the refuge and relief which are to be had in him only; and those that do so are a people of no understanding, they are without heart. Now,

2. See what becomes of this silly dove (v. 12): *When they shall go to Egypt and Assyria, I will spread my net upon them*. Note, Those that will not abide by the mercy of God must expect to be pursued by the jus-

tice of God. Here, (1.) They are ensnared: "*I will spread my net upon them, bring them into straits, that they may see their folly and think of returning.*" Note, It is common for those that go away from God to find snares where they expected shelters. (2.) They are humbled; they soar upward, proud of their foreign alliances and confiding in them; but *I will bring them down*, let them fly ever so high, *as the fowls of heaven*, that are shot flying. Note, God can and will bring those down that *exalt themselves as the eagle*, Obad. 3, 4. (3.) They are made to smart for their folly: *I will chastise them*. Note, The disappointments we meet with in the creature, when we put a confidence in it, are a necessary chastisement, or discipline, that we may learn to be wiser another time. (4.) In all this the scripture is fulfilled. It is *as their congregation has heard*; they have been many a time told by the word of God, read, and preached, and sung, in their religious assemblies, that *vain is the help of man*, that *in the son of man there is no help*; they have heard both from the law and from the prophets what judgments God would bring upon them for their wickedness; and *as they have heard now they shall see, they shall feel.*" Note, It concerns us to take notice of the word of God which we hear from time to time *in the congregation*, and to be governed by it, for we must shortly be judged by it; and it will justify God in the condemnation of sinners, and aggravate it to them, that they have had plain public warning given them of it; it is what their congregation has heard many a time, but they would not take warning. "*Son, remember thou wast told what would come of it; and now thou seest they were not vain words.*" See Zech. i. 6.

V. They revolted from God and rebelled against him, notwithstanding the various methods he took to retain them in their allegiance, v. 13—15. Here observe,

1. How kindly and tenderly God had dealt with them, as a gracious sovereign towards a people dear unto him, and whose prosperity he had much at heart. He had *redeemed them* (v. 13), brought them, at first, out of the land of Egypt, and, since, delivered them out of many a distress. He had *bound and strengthened their arms*, v. 15. When their power was weakened, like an arm broken or out of joint, God set it again, and bound it, as a surgeon does a broken bone, to make it knit. God had given Israel victories over the Syrians (2 Kings xiii. 16, 17), had *restored their coast* (2 Kings xiv. 25, 26), had *girded them with strength for battle*. "Though *I have chastened them*" (so the margin reads  $\pi$ ), "sometimes corrected them for their faults and thereby taught them, at other times *strengthened their arms* and relieved them, though I have used both fair means and foul to work upon them, it was all to no purpose; they were mercy-proof and judgment-proof."

2. How impudent their conduct had been towards him notwithstanding, which is described here for the conviction and humiliation of all those who have gone on in any way of wickedness, that they may see how exceedingly sinful their sin is, how heinous, how the God of heaven interprets it, how he resents it. (1.) He had courted them to him, and taken them into covenant with himself; but *they fled from him*, as if he had been their dangerous enemy who had always approved himself their faithful friend. They wandered from him, as the silly dove from her nest, for those who forsake God will find no rest nor settlement in the creature, but wander endlessly. They fled from God when they forsook the worship of him, and ran away from his service, and withdrew themselves from their allegiance to him. (2.) He had given them his laws, which were all holy, just, and good, by which he designed to keep them in the right way; but they *transgressed against him*; they sinned with a high hand and a stiff neck, wilfully and presumptuously (so the word signifies); they broke through the fence of the divine law, and therein thwarted the design of the divine love. (3.) He had made known his truths to them, and given them all possible proofs of the sincerity of his good-will to them; and yet they *spoke lies against him*. They set up false gods in competition with him; they denied his providence and power: thus they *belied the Lord*, Jer. v. 12. They rejected his messages sent them by his prophets, and said that they should have peace, though they went on in sin, directly against what he said. In their hypocritical professions of religion, shows of devotion, and promises of amendment, they lied to the Lord, which he took as lying against him. (4.) He was their rightful Lord and King, and had always ruled in Jacob with equity, and for the public good; and yet they *rebelled against him*, v. 14. They not only went off from him, but took up arms against him, would have deposed him if they could and set up another. (5.) He designed well for them, but they *imagined mischief against him*, v. 15. Sin is a mischievous thing; it is mischief against God, for it is treason against his crown and dignity; not that the sinners can do any thing to hurt their Creator (as one of the ancients observes on these words), but *what they can they do*; and it is so much the worse when it is not done by surprise, or through inadvertency, but designedly and with contrivance. The Jews have a saying, which Dr. Pocock quotes here, *The thoughts of transgression are worse than the transgression*. The designing of mischief is doing it, in God's account. *Compassing and imagining* the death of the king is treason by our law. Those that imagine an evil thing, though it prove a vain thing (Ps. ii. 1), will be reckoned with for the imagination.



3. How they shall be punished for this (v. 13): *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me.* Note, Those who flee from God have woes sent after them, and are, without doubt, in a woeful case. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them; the word of God says, *Woe to them!* And observe what follows immediately, *Destruction unto them!* Note, The woes of God's word have real effects; destruction makes them good. The judgments of his hand shall verify the judgments of his mouth. Those whom he curses, and pronounces woeful, they are cursed, they are woeful indeed.

VI. Their shows of devotion and reformation were but shows, and in them they did but mock God.

1. They pretended devotion, but it was not sincere, v. 14. When the hand of God had gone forth against them they made some sort of application to him. *When he slew them, then they sought him. Lord, in trouble have they visited thee.* But it was all in hypocrisy. (1.) When they were under personal troubles, and called upon God in secret, they were not sincere in that: *They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds.* When they were chastened with pain upon their beds, and the multitude of their bones with strong pains, perhaps ill of the wounds they received in war, they cried, and groaned, and complained in the forms of devotion, and, it may be, they used many good words, proper enough for the circumstances they were in; they cried, *God help us*, and, *Lord, look upon us.* But they did not cry with their heart, and therefore God reckons it as no crying to him. Moses is said to cry unto God when he spoke not a word, only his heart prayed with faith and fervency, Exod. xiv. 15. These made a great noise, and said a great deal, and yet did not cry to God, because their hearts were not right with him, not subjected to his will, devoted to his honour, nor employed in his service. To pray is to lift up the soul to God, this is the essence of prayer. If this be not done, words, though ever so well chosen, are but wind; but, if it be, it is an acceptable prayer, though the groanings cannot be uttered. Note, Those do not pray to God at all that do not pray in the spirit. Nay, God is so far from approving their prayer and accepting it that he calls it howling. Some think it intimates the noisiness of their prayers (they cried to God as they used to cry to Baal, when they thought he must be awaked), or the brutish violent passions which they vented in their prayers; they snarled at the stone, and howled under the whip, but regarded not the hand. Or it denotes that their hypocritical prayers were so far from being pleasing to God that they were offensive to him; he was angry at their prayers. The songs of the temple shall be howlings, Amos viii. 3. God will be so

far from pitying them that he will justly laugh at their calamity, who have so often laughed at his authority. (2.) When they were under public troubles, and met together to implore God's favour, in that also they were hypocritical; they assembled themselves, for fashion-sake, because it was usual to call a solemn assembly in times of general mourning, Zeph. ii. 1. But it was only to pray for corn and wine that they came together, which were the things they wanted, and feared being deprived of by the want of rain, the judgment they now laboured under. They did not pray for the favour or grace of God, that God would give them repentance, pardon their sins, and turn away his wrath, but only that he would not take away from them their corn and wine. Note, Carnal hearts, in their prayers to God, covet temporal mercies only, and dread and deprecate no other but temporal judgments, for they have no sense of any other.

2. They pretended reformation, but neither was that sincere, v. 16. Here is, (1.) The sin of Israel: *They return*, that is, they make as if they would return; they pretend to repent and amend their doings, but they make nothing of it; they do not come home to God nor return to their allegiance, whereas God says (Jer. iv. 1), *If thou wilt return, O Israel! return to me; do not only turn towards me, but return to me.* This dissimulation of theirs makes them like a deceitful bow, which looks as if it were fit for business, and is bent and drawn accordingly, but, when strength comes to be laid to it, either the bow or the string breaks, and the arrow, instead of flying to the mark, drops at the archer's foot. Such were their essays towards repentance and reformation. (2.) The sin of the princes of Israel. That which is charged upon them is the rage of their tongue, quarrelling with God and his providence and with all about them when they are crossed. Princes think they may say what they will, and that it is their prerogative to huff and bluster, to curse and rail, and to call names at their pleasure, but let them know there is a God above them that will call them to an account for the rage of their tongues and make their own tongues to fall upon them. (3.) The punishment of Israel and their princes for their sin. As for the princes, they shall fall by the sword either of their enemies or of their own people, some by one and some by the other; and this shall be their derision, this is that for which they shall be derided in the land of Egypt, when they flee to the Egyptians for succour, v. 11. Their sin and punishment shall make them a laughing-stock to all about them. Note, Those that are treacherous and deceitful in their dealings with God, and passionate and outrageous in their conduct towards men, will justly be made a derision to their neighbours, for they make themselves ridiculous

## CHAP. VIII.

This chapter, as that before, divides itself into the sins and punishments of Israel; every verse almost declares both, and all to bring them to repentance. When they saw the malignant nature of their sin, in the descriptions of that, they could not but be convinced how much it was their duty to repent of what was so bad in itself; and when they saw the mischievous consequences of their sin, in the predictions of them, they could not but see how much it was their interest to repent for the preventing of them. I. The sin of Israel is here set forth, 1. In many general expressions, ver. 1, 3, 12, 14. 2. In many particular instances; setting up kings without God (ver. 4), setting up idols against God (ver. 4-6, 11), and courting alliances with the neighbouring nations, ver. 8-10. 3. In this aggravation of it, that they still kept up a profession of religion and relation to God, ver. 2, 13, 14. II. The punishment of Israel is here set forth as answering to the sin. God would bring an enemy upon them, ver. 1, 3. All their projects should be blasted, ver. 7. Their confidence both in their idols and in their foreign alliances should disappoint them, ver. 6, 8, 10. Their strength at home should fail them, ver. 14. Their sacrifices should have no reckoning made of them, and their sins should have a reckoning made for them, ver. 13.

**SET** the trumpet to thy mouth. *He shall come* as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law. 2 Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. 3 Israel hath cast off *the thing that is good*: the enemy shall pursue him. 4 They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off. 5 Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? 6 For from Israel *was* it also: the workman made it; therefore it *is* not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. 7 For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the stranger shall swallow it up.

The reproofs and threatenings here are introduced with an order to the prophet to *set the trumpet to his mouth* (v. 1), thus to call a solemn assembly, that all might take notice of what he had to deliver and take warning by it. He must sound an alarm, must, in God's name, proclaim war with this rebellious nation. An enemy is coming with speed and fury to seize their land, and he must awaken them to expect it. Thus the prophet must do the part of a watchman, that was by sound of trumpet to call the besieged to stand to their arms, when he saw the besiegers making their attack, Ezek. xxxiii. 3 The prophet must *lift up his voice like a trumpet* (Isa. lviii. 1), and the people must hearken to the sound of the trumpet, Jer. vi. 17. Now,

I. Here is a general charge drawn up against them as sinners, as rebels and traitors against their sovereign Lord. 1. They have *transgressed my covenant*, v. 1. They have

not only transgressed the command (every sin does that), but they have *transgressed the covenant*; they have been guilty of such sins as break the original contract; they have revolted from their allegiance, and violated the marriage-covenant by their spiritual whoredom; they have, in effect, declared that they will be no longer God's people, nor take him for their God; that is *transgressing the covenant*. They have not only done foolishly, but have dealt deceitfully. 2. They have *trespassed against my law* in many particular instances. God's law is the rule by which we are to walk; and this is the malignity of sin, that it trespasses upon the bounds set us by that law. 3. They have *cast off the thing that is good*. They have *put away and rejected good*, that is, God himself; so some understand it, and very fitly. He is good, and does good, and is our goodness. *There is none good but one, that is God*, the fountain of all good. They have *cast him off*, as not desiring to have any thing more to do with him. God was abandoning them to ruin, and here gives the reason for it. Note, God never casts off any till they first cast him off. Or, as we read it, They have cast off *the thing that is good*; they have cast off the service and worship of God, which is, in effect, *casting God off*. They have cast off that which denominates men good; they have cast off the fear of God, and the regard of man, and all sense of virtue and honesty. Observe, *They have transgressed my covenant*; it has come to this at last; for *they trespassed against my law*. Breaking the command made way for breaking the covenant; and they did that, for they *cast off that which was good*; there it began first. They *left off to be wise and to do good*, and then they went all to naught, Ps. xxxvi. 3. See the method of apostasy; men first cast off that which is good; then those omissions make way for commissions; and frequent actual transgressions of God's law bring men at length to an habitual renunciation of his covenant. When men cast off praying, and hearing, and sabbath-sanctification, and other things that are good, they are in the high road to a total forsaking of God.

II. Here are general threatenings of wrath and ruin for their sin: *The enemy shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord*, and (v. 3) *shall pursue him*. If by the house of the Lord we understand the temple at Jerusalem, by the eagle that comes against it we must suppose to be meant either Sennacherib, who had taken all the fenced cities of Judah, laid siege to Jerusalem (and, no doubt, aimed at the house of the Lord, to lay that waste, as he had done the temples of the gods of other nations), or Nebuchadnezzar, who burnt the temple and made a prey of the vessels of the temple. But, if we make it to point at the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria, we must reckon it is



the body of that people which as Israelites, to whom *pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants*, is here called the *house of the Lord*. They thought their being so would be their protection; but the prophet is directed to tell them that now they had lost the life and spirit of their religion, though they still retained the name and form of it, they were but as a carcase to which the eagles and other birds of prey should be gathered together. The enemy shall pursue them as an eagle, so swiftly, so strongly, so furiously. Note, Those who break their covenant of friendship with God expose themselves to the enmity of all about them, to whom they make themselves a cheap and easy prey; and their having been the *house of the Lord*, and his living temples, will be no excuse nor refuge to them. See Amos iii. 2.

III. Here is the people's hypocritical claim of relation to God, when they were in trouble and distress (v. 2): *Israel shall cry unto me*; when either they are threatened with these judgments, and would plead an exemption, or when the judgments are inflicted on them and they apply to God for relief, *pouring out a prayer when God's chastening is upon them*, they will plead that among them *God is known* and *his name is great* (Ps. lxxvi. 1) and in their distress will pretend to that knowledge of God's ways which in their prosperity they *desired not*, but *despised*. They will then cry unto God, will call him their God, and (as impudent beggars) will tell him they are well acquainted with him, and have known him long. Note. There are many who in works deny God, and disown him, yet, to serve a turn, will profess that they *know him*, that they know more of him than some of their neighbours do. But what stead will it stand a man in to be able to say, *My God, I know thee*, when he cannot say, "*My God, I love thee*," and "*My God, I serve thee, and cleave to thee only*?"

IV. Here is the prophet's expostulation with them, in God's name (v. 5): *How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?* It is not meant of absolute innocency (that is what the guilty can never attain to); but how long will it be ere they repent and reform, ere they become innocent in this matter, and free from the sin of idolatry? They are wedded to their idols; how long will it be ere they are weaned from them, ere they are able to *get clear of them*? so it might be rendered. This intimates that custom in sin makes it very difficult for men to part with it. It is hard to cleanse from that filthiness, either of flesh or spirit, which has been long wallowed in. But God speaks as if he thought the time long till sinners cast away their iniquities and come to live a new life. He complains of their obstinacy; it is that which keeps his anger against them burning, which would soon be turned away if they did but *attain to innocency* from those sins that kindled it. They in trouble cry, *How long will*

it be ere God return to us in a way of mercy? but they do not hear him ask, *How long will it be ere they return to God in a way of duty?*

V. Here are some particular sins which they are charged with, are convicted of the folly of, and warned of the fatal consequences of, and for which God's *anger is kindled against them*.

1. In their civil affairs. They set up kings *without God*, and in contempt of him, v. 4. So they did when they rejected Samuel, in whom the Lord was their king, and chose Saul, that they might be *like the nations*. So they did when they revolted from their allegiance to the house of David, and set up Jeroboam, wherein, though they fulfilled God's secret counsel, yet they aimed not at his glory, nor consulted his oracle, nor applied to him by prayer for direction, nor had any regard to his providence, but were led by their own humour and hurried on by the impetus of their own passions. So they did now about the time when Hosea prophesied, when it seems to have grown fashionable to *set up kings*, and depose them again, according as the contenders for the crown could make an interest, 2 Kings xv. 8, &c. Note. We cannot expect comfort and success in our affairs when we go about them, and go on in them, without consulting God and acknowledging not him in all our ways: "*They set up kings, and I knew it not*, that is, I did not know it from them, they did not ask *counsel at my mouth*, whether they might lawfully do it or whether it would be best for them to do it, though they had prophets and oracles with whom they might have advised." They looked not to the *Holy One of Israel*, Isa. xxxi. 1. Nor did the princes do as Jephthah, who, before he took upon him the government, *uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*, Judg. xi. 11. Note, Those that are entrusted with public concerns, and particularly with the election and nomination of magistrates, ought to take God along with them therein, by desiring his direction and designing his honour.

2. In their religious matters they did much worse; for they *set up calves against God*, in competition with him and contradiction to him. "*Of their silver and their gold which God gave them, and multiplied to them*, that they might serve and honour him with them, they have made them idols." They called them *gods* (1 Kings xii. 28, *Behold thy gods, O Israel!*) but God calls them *idols*; the word signifies *griefs*, or *troubles*, because they are offensive to God and will be ruining to those that worship them. *Their silver and their gold they have made to them idols*; so the words are, referring primarily to the images of their gods, which they made of gold and silver, especially the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Idolaters spare no cost in worshipping their idols. But they are very applicable to the spiritual idolatry of the covetous: *Their silver and their gold* are the

gods they place their happiness in, set their hearts upon, to which they pay their homage, and in which they put their confidence. Now, to show them the folly of their idolatry, he tells them,

(1.) Whence their gods came. Trace them to their original, and they will be found the creatures of their own fancies and the work of their own hands, v. 6. The calf they worshipped is here called *the calf of Samaria*, because it is probable that when Samaria, in Ahab's time, became the metropolis of the kingdom, a calf was set up there to be near the court, besides those at Dan and Bethel, or perhaps one of those was removed thither; for those that are for new gods will still be for newer. Now let them consider what this god of theirs owed its rise and being to. [1.] To their own invention and institution: *From Israel was it also*, not from the God of Israel (he expressly forbade it), but from Israel; it was a device of their own (some think), not borrowed from any of their neighbours, no, not from the Egyptians, for, though they worshipped Apis in a living cow, they never worshipped a *golden calf*; that was from Israel; it was *their own iniquity*. Now could that be worthy of their worship which was a contrivance of their own? It was *from Israel*, that is, the gold and silver of which it was made were collected from the people of Israel by a brief: it was a poor god that was framed by contribution. [2.] It was owing to the skill and labour of the craftsman, Deut. xxvii. 15. *The workmen made it, therefore it is not God*, v. 6. This is a very cogent conclusive argument, and the inference so very plain that one would think their own thoughts should have suggested it to them, so as to make them ashamed of their idolatry. What can be more absurd than for men to worship that as a god, giving being and good to them, which they themselves gave being to (both matter and form), but could not give life to? A made god is no God. This is a self-evident truth; and yet St. Paul was accused as a criminal for preaching that *those are no gods which are made with hands*, Acts xix. 26. And, here, this which should have turned them from their idols comes in as a reason why they were inseparably wedded to them; therefore they could not attain to innocency because it was *from themselves*; they were willing to have gods of their own to do what they pleased with, that they themselves might do what they pleased.

(2.) What their gods would come to. If they are not gods, they will not last; nay, if they pretend to be gods, they will be reckoned with. *The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces*, and those that would not yield to the force of the former argument shall be convinced by this that it is not God, but an *unprofitable idol*, as the Chaldee calls it. It shall be *broken to shivers*, like a potter's vessel, though it be a golden calf. It shall be *chips or saw-dust*; it shall be a *spider's web*;

so St. Jerome. It seems to allude to Moses's grinding to powder the golden calf that was in his time. This shall be served as that was. Sennacherib boasted what he had done to *Samaria and her idols*, Isa. x. 11. Note, Deifying any creature makes way for the destruction of it. If they had made vessels and ornaments for themselves of their silver and gold, they might have remained; but, if they make gods of them, they shall be *broken to pieces*.

(3.) What their gods would bring them to. The breaking of them to pieces would be a disappointment to those who trusted in them. But that was not all: *They have made to themselves idols, that they may be cut off* (v. 4), that their gold and silver, which they so abused, may be cut off (so some take it), nay, that they may themselves be cut off from God, from their own land, from the land of the living. Their idolatry will as certainly end in their extirpation as if they had purposely designed it. And, when this proves to be the effect of their sin, what relief will they have from the gods wherein they trusted? None at all: "*Thy calf, O Samaria! has cast thee off*"; it cannot give thee any help in thy distress, and the pleasure thou now takest in it will vanish, and be no pleasure to thee." Those that were justly sent to the gods whom they had chosen found them *miserable comforters*, Judg. x. 14. If men will not quit the love and service of sin, yet they shall certainly lose all the delights and profits of it. If Samaria had continued firm and faithful to the God of Israel, he would have been a present powerful help to her; but the calf she preferred before him was a broken reed. The case will be the same with those that make their silver and their gold their god. It will *cast them off*, and not *profit them in the day of wrath*, Ezek. vii. 12. Note, Those that suffer themselves to be deceived into any idolatries will certainly find themselves deceived in them. Cardinal Wolsey owned that if he had served his God as faithfully as he had served his prince he would not have *cast him off*, as his prince did, in his old age. Their disappointment in their idols is illustrated (v. 7) by a similitude which intimates both that and the destruction which God brought upon them for their idolatry. [1.] They got no good to themselves by worshipping idols: *They have sown the wind*. They have put themselves to a great deal of trouble and expense to make and worship their idols, have made a business of it as much as the husbandman does of sowing his corn, in expectation of reaping some mighty advantage from it, and that they should be as prosperous and victorious as the neighbouring nations were, that worshipped idols. But it is all a cheat; it is like *sowing the wind*, which can yield no increase; they *labour in vain, labour for the wind*, Eccl. v. 16. They take great pains to no purpose, and *weary themselves for very*



vanity; Hab. ii. 13. Those that make an idol of his world do so; they set their eyes on that which is not, which, like the wind, makes a great noise, but has nothing substantial in it. [2.] They brought ruin upon themselves by it: They shall reap the whirlwind, a great whirlwind (so the word signifies), which shall hurry them away and dash them to pieces. They not only have not their false gods for them, but they set the true God against them; their favour will stand them in no more stead than the wind, but his wrath will do them more mischief than a whirlwind. As a man sows, so shall he reap. "If it may be supposed that a man should sow the wind, and cover it with earth, or keep it there for a while penned up, what could he expect but that it should be forced by its being shut up, and the accession of what might increase its strength, to break forth again in greater quantities with greater violence?" So Dr. Pocock. They promise themselves plenty, peace, and victory, by worshipping idols, but their expectations come to nothing. What they sow never comes up; it has no stalk, no blade, or, if it have, the bud shall yield no meal; it shall be as the thin ears in Pharaoh's dream, that were blasted with the east wind, and there was nothing in them. Or if it yield, if they do prosper for a while in their idolatrous courses, the strangers shall swallow it up; it shall be so far from doing them any service that it shall be but as a bait to invite strangers to invade them, and as a spoil to enrich those strangers and enable them to do so much the more mischief. Note, The service of idols is an unprofitable service, and the works of darkness are unfruitful: nay, in the end they will be pernicious. Rom. vi. 21, *The end of those things is death.* Those that sow iniquity reap vanity: nay, those that sow to the flesh, reap corruption. The hopes of sinners will be cheats, and their gains will be snares.

8 Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure. 9 For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. 10 Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them, and they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes. 11 Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin. 12 I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing. 13 They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth them not; now will he remember

their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt. 14 For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.

It was the honour and happiness of Israel that they had but one God to trust to and he all-sufficient in every strait, and but one God to serve, and he well worthy of all their devotions. But it was their sin, and folly, and shame, that they knew not when they were well off, that they forsook their own mercies for lying vanities; for,

1. They multiplied their alliances (v. 9): *They have hired lovers*, or (as the margin reads it) *they have hired loves*. They were at great expense to purchase the friendship of the nations about them, that otherwise had no value nor affection at all for them, nor cared for having any thing to do with them but only upon the Shechemites' principles—*Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours?* Gen. xxxiv. 23. Had Israel maintained the honour of their peculiarity, the surrounding nations would have continued to admire them as a wise and understanding people; but, when they profaned their own crown, their neighbours despised them, and they had no interest in them further than they paid dearly for it. But those surely have behaved ill among their neighbours who have no loves, no lovers, but what they hire. See here, 1. The contempt that Israel lay under among the nations (v. 8): *Israel is swallowed up*, devoured by strangers, their land eaten up (v. 7), and themselves too, and, being impoverished, they have quite lost their credit and reputation, like a merchant that has become a bankrupt, so that they are among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure, a vessel of dishonour (2 Tim. ii. 20), a despised broken vessel, Jer. xxii. 28. None of their neighbours have any value for them, nor care to have any thing to do with them. Note, Those that have professed religion, if they degenerate and grow profane, are of all men the most contemptible. *If the salt have lost its savour*, it is fit for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men. Or it denotes their dispersion and captivity among the Gentiles; they shall be among them poor and prisoners; and who has pleasure in such? 2. The court that Israel made to the nations notwithstanding (v. 9): They have gone to Assyria, to engage the king of Assyria to help them; and herein they are as a wild ass alone by himself, foolish, headstrong, and unruly; they will have their way, and nothing shall hold them in, no, not the bridle of God's laws, nothing shall turn them back, no, not the sword of God's wrath. They take a course by themselves, and the effect will be that, like a wild ass by himself,

they will be the easier and surer prey to the lion. See Job xi. 12; Jer. ii. 24. Note, Man is in nothing more like the wild ass's colt than in seeking for that succour and that satisfaction in the creature which are to be had in God only. 3. The crosses that they were likely to meet with in their alliances with the neighbouring nations (v. 10): *Though they have hired among the nations, and hoped thereby to prevent their own ruin, yet now will I gather them, as the sheaves in the floor* (Mic. iv. 12); so that what they provided for their own safety shall but make them the easier prey to their enemies. Note, There is no fence against the judgments of God, when they come with commission; nay, that which men hire for their own preservation often contributes to their own destruction. See Isa. vii. 20. The king of Assyria, whose friendship they courted, called himself a *king of princes*, Isa. x. 8. *Are not my princes altogether kings?* He laid *burdens* upon Israel, levied taxes upon them, 2 Kings xv. 19, 20. And for these *they shall sorrow a little*; this shall be but a little burden to them in comparison of what they may further expect; or they will be but little sensible of this grievance, will not lay it to heart, and therefore may expect heavier judgments. *They have begun to be diminished* (so some read it), *by the burden of the king of princes*; but this is only the *beginning of sorrows* (Matt. xxiv. 8), *the beginning of revenges*, Deut. xxxii. 42. Note, God often comes gradually with his judgments upon a provoking people, that he may show how slow he is to wrath, and may awaken them to repentance; but those that are made to *sorrow a little*, if they are not thereby brought to sorrow after a godly sort, will, another day, be made to sorrow a great deal, to sorrow everlastingly.

If They multiplied their altars and temples. Observe,

1. How they denied the power of godliness, and wholly cast that off (v. 12): *I have written to him the great things of my law*; this intimates the privilege they enjoyed, as having God's statutes and judgments made known to them, and being entrusted with the lively oracles. Note, (1.) The things of God's law are *magnalia Dei*—the great things of God. They are things that proclaim the greatness of the Law-maker, and things of great use and great importance to us; they are our life, and our eternal welfare depends upon our observance of them and obedience to them; they will make us great if we make a right use of them; and they are things which God will magnify and make honourable. (2.) It is a great privilege to have the things of God's law written; thus they are reduced to a greater certainty, spread the further, and last the longer, with much less danger of being embezzled and corrupted than if they were transmitted by word of mouth only. (3.) The things of God's law

are of his own writing; for Moses and the prophets were his amanuenses, and holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (4.) It is the advantage of those that are members of the visible church that these great things are written to them, are intended for their direction, and so they must receive them; what things were written in former ages were written for our learning, and are profitable for us. And, if those were happy who had the great things of God's law written to them, how much happier are we who have the much greater things of his gospel written to us! But see how this privilege was slighted; these great things of the law were counted as a strange thing, as unintelligible and unreasonable (which might therefore be slighted, because not to be fathomed, not to be accounted for), or as foreign, and things of no concernment to them, things that they had nothing to do with nor were to be governed by; they used those things as strangers, which they were shy of, and knew not how to bid welcome. *We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* Note, [1.] God having written to us the great things of his law, we ought to make them familiar to us, as our nearest relations (Prov. vii. 3, 4); for therefore we have them written, that they may talk with us, Prov. vi. 22. [2.] We make nothing of the things of God's law if we make strange of them, as if they did not affect us and therefore we need not be affected with them.

2. How they kept up the form of godliness notwithstanding, and to what little purpose they did so.

(1.) They multiplied their altars (v. 11): *Ephraim made many altars to sin.* God appointed that there should be but one altar for sacrifice (Deut. xii. 3, 5); but the ten tribes, having forsaken that, would still be thought very devout, and zealous for the honour of God, and, as if they would make amends for the affront they put on God's altar, they made many altars, dedicated to the God of Israel, whom hereby they intended, or at least pretended, to give glory to; but that would not justify their violation of God's express command, nor would the example of the patriarchs, who before the law of Moses had many altars. No, they made many altars to sin (that is, they did that which turned into sin to them), and therefore these altars shall be unto them to sin, that is, God will charge it upon them as a heinous sin, and put that upon the score of their crimes which they designed to be for the expiation of their crimes. Or they shall be to them an occasion of further sin. Their multiplying of altars dedicated to the God of Israel would introduce altars dedicated to other gods. Note, It is a great sin to corrupt the worship of God, and it will be charged as sin upon those that do it, how plausible soever their pretensions may be. And the way of this, as other sins, is down-hill; those



that once deviate from the fixed rule of God's commands will wander endlessly.

(2.) They multiplied their sacrifices, *v. 13.* Their altars were smoking altars: They *sacrificed flesh for the sacrifices of God's offerings*, and they celebrated their feasts upon their sacrifices; they were at a great expense upon their devotions, and (as those commonly are who set up their own inventions in the room of divine institutions) were very zealous in their way; as if they hoped by their impositions on themselves to atone for the contempt of the great atonement, and by their observing a ceremonial law of their own to excuse themselves from the obligation of all God's moral precepts. But how did they speed? [1.] God makes no reckoning of their services: *The Lord accepts them not.* How should he, when they did not offer their sacrifice upon that altar which alone *sanctified the gift*, and when they only sacrificed flesh, but not the spiritual sacrifice of a penitent believing heart? Note, Those services only are acceptable to God which are performed according to the rule of his word, and *through Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. [2.] He takes that occasion to reckon with them for their sins; now will he, instead of pardoning their iniquity and blotting out their sins, as they expected, *remember their iniquity and visit their sins.* Such an *abomination to the Lord* are the *sacrifices of the wicked* that they provoke him to call them to an account for all their other abominations. When they think by their sacrifices to bribe the Judge of heaven and earth into a connivance at their wickedness he will resent that as the highest affront they can put upon him, and it shall be the measure-filling sin. Note, A petition for leave to sin amounts to an imprecation of the curse for sin, and so it shall be answered, *according to the multitude of the idols.* "I will punish their sins, *for they shall return to Egypt;*" they shall be carried captive into Assyria, which shall be to them a house of bondage, as Egypt was to their fathers. Or it refers to Deut. xxviii. 68, where returning to Egypt is made to close and complete the miseries of that sinful nation.

(3.) They multiplied their temples, and these also in honour of the true God, as they pretended, but really in contempt of the choice he had made of Jerusalem to *put his name there.* *Israel has forgotten his Maker, v. 14.* They pretended to know him, and yet forgot him, for they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*, when the remembrance of him would give check to their lusts. It was an aggravation of their sin in forgetting God that he was *their Maker* (Deut. xxxii. 15, 18; Job xxxv. 10), as nothing obliges us more to remember him than that he is *our Creator*, Eccl. xii. 1. "He has *forgotten his Maker, and builds temples;* he seems by the temples he builds to be mindful of his Maker, and to be desirous still to keep him in mind, and

yet really he has forgotten him, because he has cast off the fear of him." Some by temples here understand *palaces*, for so the word sometimes signifies. "*He has forgotten his Maker*, and yet is so secure and haughty that he sets his judgments at defiance, as Nebuchadnezzar did when he said, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built?*" Judah is likewise charged with *multiplying fenced cities*, and trusting in them for safety, when the judgments of God were abroad. To fortify their cities in subjection and subordination to God was well enough; but to fortify them in opposition to God, and without any regard to him or his providence (Isa. xxii. 11), shows their hearts to be desperately *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* But *none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*, nor shall they. *God will send a fire upon his cities*, upon the cities both of Judah and Israel, not only the head-cities of Jerusalem and Samaria, but all the other cities of those two kingdoms, and it shall devour not only the cottages, but *the palaces thereof*; though ever so strong, the fire shall master them; though ever so stately and sumptuous, the fire shall not spare them. This was fulfilled when all the cities of Israel were laid in ashes by the king of Assyria, and all the cities of Judah by the king of Babylon. The fires they both kindled were of his sending; and when he judges he will overcome.

#### CHAP. IX.

In this chapter, I. God threatens to deprive this degenerate seed of Israel of all their worldly enjoyments, because by sin they had forfeited their title to them; so that they should have no comfort either in receiving them themselves or in offering them to God, ver. 1-5. II. He dooms them to utter ruin, for their own sins and the sins of their prophets, ver. 6-8. III. He upbraids them with the wickedness of their fathers before them, whose steps they tread in, ver. 9, 10. IV. He threatens them with the destruction of their children and the rooting out of their posterity, ver. 11-17.

**R**EJOICE not, O Israel, for joy, as *other people*: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every corn-floor. 2 The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her. 3 They shall not dwell in the LORD's land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean *things* in Assyria. 4 They shall not offer wine-offerings to the LORD, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices *shall be* unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the LORD. 5 What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the LORD? 6 For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall

bury them: the pleasant *places* for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns *shall be* in their tabernacles.

Here, I. The people of Israel are charged with spiritual adultery: *O Israel! thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, v. 1. Their covenant with God was a marriage-covenant, by which they were joined to him as their God, renouncing all others. But when they set up idols and worshipped them, when they fled to creatures for succour and put a confidence in them, they *went a whoring from God* as their God, and honoured the pretenders and rivals with the affection, adoration, and confidence, which were due to God only. Other people were idolaters, but that sin was not, in them, going a whoring from God, as it was in Israel that had been married to him. Note, The sins of those who have made a profession of religion and relation to God are more provoking to him than the sins of others. As a proof of their going a whoring from God, it is charged upon them that *they loved a reward upon every corn-floor*. 1. They loved to give rewards to their idols, in the offerings and first-fruits they presented to them out of every corn-floor. They took a strange pleasure in serving their idols with that which they would have grudged to consecrate to God and employ in his service. Note, It is common for those that are niggardly in the expenses of their religion to be very prodigal in spending upon their lusts. Or, 2. They loved to receive rewards from their idols; and such they reckoned the fruits of the earth to be: *These are my rewards, which my lovers have given me*, ch. ii. 12. Note, Those are directly disposed to spiritual idolatry that love a reward in the corn-floor better than a reward in the favour of God and eternal life.

II. They are forbidden to rejoice as other people do: "*Rejoice not, O Israel! for joy. Do not expect to rejoice. What peace, what joy, what hast thou to do with either, while thy whoredoms and witchcrafts are so many?*" 2 Kings ix. 19—22. Be not disposed to rejoice, for it does not become thee, but rather to be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, Jam. iv. 9. Judah, that keeps close to the true God, nay, and other people that never knew him, nor could ever be charged with revolting from him, may be allowed to rejoice, as not having so much cause to be ashamed as Israel has, that has gone a whoring from him. Some think that they had at this time particular occasions for joy, probably upon the account of some losses recovered, or some advantages gained, or some league made with a potent ally, for which they had public rejoicings, as other people used to have upon such occasions; but God sends to them not to rejoice. Note, Joy is forbidden fruit to wicked people. They must not rejoice, because they have gone a whoring from their God; and therefore, 1. Whatever it was

that they rejoiced in, it would be no security nor advantage to them, so long as they were at a distance from God and at war with him. Note, We are likely to have small joy of any of our creature-comforts if we make not God our chief joy. 2. The sense of sin and dread of wrath ought to be a damp upon their joy and a strong alloy to all their comforts. Note, Those who by departing from God have made work for repentance have thereby marred their own mirth, till they return and make their peace with God.

III. They are threatened with destroying judgments for their spiritual whoredoms, according to what was said long before. Ps. lxxiii. 27, *Thou hast destroyed all those that go a whoring from thee*. It is here threatened,

1. That their land shall not yield its wonted increase. Canaan, that fruitful land, shall be turned into barrenness for the wickedness of those that dwell therein. They love the reward in the corn-floor, and are so full of the joy of harvest that they have no disposition at all to mourn for their sins; and therefore God will, for their effectual humiliation, take away from them, not only their delights and dainties, but even their necessary food (v. 2): *The floor and the wine-press shall not feed them*, much less feast them; they shall either be blasted by the hand of God or plundered by the hand of man. The new wine with which they used to make merry shall fail in her. Note, When we make the world, and the things of it, our idol and portion, above what they were designed for, it is just with God to deny us even support and nourishment from them, according to that which they were designed for, to show us our folly and correct us for it. Let those miss of their food in the corn-floor that look for their reward in the corn-floor. We forfeit the good things of this world if we love them as the best things.

2. That their land shall not only cease to feed them, but cease to lodge them and to be a habitation for them; it shall spue them out, as it had done the Canaanites before them (v. 3): *They shall not dwell any longer in the Lord's land*. The land of Canaan was in a peculiar manner the Lord's land, the land of the Shechinah (so the Chaldee), the land of the Lord of the world (so the Arabic); he whose all the earth is (Ps. xxiv. 1) took that for his demesne. *The land is mine*, says God, Lev. xxv. 23. They had used it, or abused it rather, as if it had been their own, had not paid the rent, nor done the services, due to God as their landlord, and therefore God justly enters, and takes possession of it, they having forfeited their lease. "It is my land" (says God) "and I will make it appear, for they shall be turned off, as bad tenants; and be made to know that, though they thought themselves freeholders, they were but tenants at will." Note, It is for the honour of God's justice and holiness that those who go a whoring from God



should not be suffered to dwell upon his land; and therefore, sooner or later, the wicked shall be *chased out of the world*. Or it is called the Lord's land because it was the holy land, *Immanuel's land*, the land that had peculiar tokens of God's favour to it, and presence in it, where God was known and his name was great, where God's prophets and oracles were; it was a kind of copy of the earthly paradise, and a type of the heavenly one. It was a great privilege to have a lot in such a land as this. It was a great sin and folly to rebel against God, and go a whoring from him, in such a land as this, *to deal unjustly in a land of uprightness*, Isa. xxvi. 10. And it was a sad and sore judgment to be driven out from such a land as this; it was like driving our first parents out of the garden of Eden, and almost amounted to an exclusion out of the heavenly Canaan. Note, Those cannot expect to dwell in the Lord's land that will not be subject to the Lord's laws, nor be influenced by his love. Those have forfeited the privileges of the church that conform not to the rules of it.

3. That, when they are turned out from the Lord's land, they shall have no rest nor satisfaction in any other land. When Cain was driven out from the presence of the Lord he was a *fugitive and a vagabond* ever after, and dwelt in the land of trembling. So Israel here. Some shall *return into Egypt*, the old house of bondage; thither they shall flee from the Assyrian (*ch. viii. 13*) and they shall lose and ruin themselves where they thought to hide and help themselves. Others shall be carried captives to Assyria and there shall be forced to *eat unclean things*, either (1.) Such things as were not fit for men to eat, that which is rotten and putrefied, intimating that they shall be reduced to the utmost poverty, as the prodigal that would fain have filled his belly *with the husks*. Or, (2.) Such things as were not fit for Jews to eat, being prohibited by their law. It is probable that while they were in their own land, however disobedient in other things, they kept up the distinction of meats, and prided themselves in that; but, since they would not keep the law of God in other things, they should not be suffered to keep it in that, and it was a just punishment of their sin in eating things offered to idols. Note, When at any time we suffer in our food, and either through want or for our health are forced to eat or drink that which is displeasing, we must acknowledge that God is righteous, because we have sinned about our food, and have indulged ourselves too much in that which is pleasing.

4. That in the land of their enemies, to which they shall be driven, they shall have no opportunity either of giving honour to God or obtaining favour with God, by offering any acceptable sacrifice to him; they should not be in a capacity of keeping up any face or show of religion among them; "and

so" (as Dr. Pocock expresses it) "should be as it were quite cut off from any expression of relation to him, from all signs of grace, and means of reconciliation with him, which would be to them a token of their being rejected of God, estranged from him, and no more owned by him as his people."

(1.) They shall have no sacrifices to offer, nor any altar to offer them on, nor priests to offer them; they shall not so much as *offer drink-offerings* to the Lord, much less any other sacrifices. (2.) If they should offer them, neither they nor their sacrifices shall be pleasing to him, for they cannot have any legal offerings, nor are their hearts humbled. (3.) Instead of their sacrifices of joy and praise, they shall *eat the bread of mourners*; they shall live desolate, and disconsolate, mourning for the death of their relations and their own miseries, so that if they had opportunity of sacrificing they should never be themselves in a frame fit for it; for they were forbidden to eat of the holy things *in their mourning*, Deut. xxvi. 14. *All that eat of the bread of mourners are polluted, and incapacitated to partake of the altar*. (4.) Their *bread for their soul*, the bread which they must either eat or starve, the bread which they shall have for the support of their lives, *shall not come into the house of the Lord*; they shall have no house of the Lord to bring it to, or, if they had, it is such as is not fit to be brought, nor are they rightly disposed to bring it. (5.) The return of the days of their sacred and solemn feasts would therefore be very melancholy and uncomfortable to them (*v. 5*): *What will you do in the solemn day, in the sabbath, the solemn day of every week, in the new moons, the solemn days of every month, at the return of the times for keeping the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles, the solemn days of every year, the days of the feasts of the Lord?* Note, The feasts of the Lord are solemn days; and, when we are invited to those feasts, we ought to consider seriously what we shall do. But the question is here put to those who were to be deprived of the benefit and comfort of those solemn feasts, *"What will you do then?"* You will then spend those days in sorrow and lamentation which, if it had not been your own fault, you might have been spending in joy and praise. You will then be made to know the worth of mercies by the want of them and to prize spiritual bread by being made to feel a famine of it." Note, When we enjoy the means of grace we ought to consider what we shall do if ever we should know the want of them, if either they should be taken from us or we be disabled to attend upon them.

5. That they should perish in the land of their dispersion (*v. 6*): *For, lo, they have gone out of the Lord's land, where they might have spent both their sabbath days and other days with comfort, gone because of destruction, gone to Egypt because of the destruc-*

tion of their own country by the Assyrians, flattering themselves with hopes that they shall return when the storm is over; but those hopes also shall fail them; they shall find there are *graves in Egypt*, as their murmuring ancestors said (Exod. xiv. 11), graves for them; for *Egypt shall gather them up*, as dead men are gathered up and carried forth to the grave, and Memphis (one of the chief cities of Egypt) *shall bury them*. *Gathering and burying* are put together, Jer. viii. 2; Job xxvii. 19. Note, Those that think presumptuously to flee from the judgments of God are likely enough to meet their death where they hoped to save their lives.

6. That their land, which they left behind and to which they hoped to return, should become a desolation: As for *their tabernacles*, where they formerly dwelt and where they kept their stores, *the pleasant places for their silver*, they shall be demolished and laid in ruins, to such a degree that they shall be overgrown with *nettles*; so that if they should survive the trouble, and return to their own land again, they would find it neither fruitful nor habitable; it would afford them neither food nor lodging. Note, Those that make their money their god reckon the *places of their silver* their *pleasant places*, as those that make the Lord their God reckon his tabernacles amiable and his ordinances their pleasant things, Isa. lxiv. 11. But, while the pleasures of communion with God are out of the reach of chance and change, the *pleasant places of men's silver*, which were purchased with silver, or in which they deposited their silver, or which were beautified and adorned with silver, are liable to be laid in ruins, in nettles, and therewith all the pleasure men took in them.

7 The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come; Israel shall know *it*: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred. 8 The watchman of Ephraim *was* with my God: *but* the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways, *and* hatred in the house of his God. 9 They have deeply corrupted *themselves*, as in the days of Gibeah: *therefore* he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins. 10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig-tree at her first time: *but* they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto *that* shame; and *their* abominations were according as they loved.

For their further awakening, it is here threatened,

I. That the destruction spoken of shall come speedily. They shall have no reason to hope for a long reprieve, for the judgment slumbers not; it is at the door (v. 7): *The days of visitation have come*, and there shall be no more delay; *the days of recompence have come*, which they have been so often warned to expect; their prophets have told them that destruction *would come*, and now *it has come*, and the time of the divine patience has expired. Note, 1. The day of God's judgment is both a *day of visitation*, in which men's sins are enquired into and brought to light, and a *day of recompence*, in which men's doom will be passed, and a reward given to every man according to his work; the strict visitation is in order to a just retribution. 2. This day of visitation and recompence is hastening on apace. It is sure; it is near; as if it had already come.

II. That hereby they shall be made ashamed of their sentiments concerning their prophets. When the day of visitation comes *Israel shall know it*, shall be made to know that by sad experience which they would not know by instruction. *Israel shall know* then what an *evil and bitter thing it is to depart from God*, and what a *fearful thing it is to fall into his hands*. *When thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see*. Israel shall know the difference between true prophets and false. 1. They shall know then that the pretenders to prophecy, who flattered them in their sins, and rocked them asleep in their security, and told them that they should have peace though they went on, however they pretended to be *spiritual men* (as Ahab's prophets did, 1 Kings xxii 24), were *fools* and *madmen*, and not true prophets; they deceived themselves and those to whom they prophesied. But why would God suffer his people Israel to be imposed upon by those false prophets? He answers, "*It is for the multitude of thy iniquity* which, in contempt of the divine law, thou hast persisted in, *and, for the great hatred of the true prophets*, that reproved thee, in God's name, for it." Note, Because men receive not the love of the truth, but conceive a hatred of it, and by the multitude of their iniquities bid defiance to it, therefore God shall send them *strong delusions*, to believe a *lie*, so strong that they shall not be undeceived till the day of visitation and recompence comes, which will convince them of the folly and madness of those that seduced them and of their own folly and madness in suffering themselves to be seduced by them. 2. They shall know then whether the *true prophets*, that were really *spiritual men*, guided by the Spirit of God, were such as they called and counted them, *fools and madmen*; and they shall be convinced that they were so far from being so that they were the wise men of their times, and God's faithful ambassadors to them. When Israel saw that none of Samuel's words *fell to the ground*



they knew he was *established to be a prophet* (1 Sam. iii. 20); and so here, when God fulfils the word of his messengers, by bringing the days of recompence they foretold, then those that despised and ridiculed them, and thought Bedlam the fittest place for them, will be ashamed of *the multitude of their iniquities* of that kind, and of *their great hatred*, for which God brings upon them this swift destruction. Mocking the messengers of the Lord was the sin they were punished for, and so made ashamed of.

III. That hereby the wickedness of the false prophets themselves shall be manifested to their shame (v. 8): "*The watchman of Ephraim was with my God*; he had been formerly. They had a set of worthy good ministers, that kept close to God and maintained communion with him; but now they have a race of corrupt, malignant, persecuting prophets, that are the ring-leaders of all mischief." Or, "*The watchman of Ephraim now pretends to have been with my God*, and prefaces his lies with, *Thus saith the Lord*; but he is a *snare of a fowler in all his ways*, and is cunning to draw the simple into sin and the upright into trouble; and he is so full of hatred and enmity to goodness and good men that he has become *hated itself in the house of his God*, or *against the house of his God*." Note, Wicked prophets are the worst of men; their sins against God are most heinous, and their plots against religion most dangerous. They may boast that they are *watchmen, speculators*, and, as far as speculation goes, they may be right, and *with my God*, may have their heads full of good notions; but look into their lives, and they are the *snare of a fowler in all their ways*, catching for themselves and making a prey of others; look into *their hearts*, and they are *hated in the house of my God*, very malicious and spiteful against good ministers and good people. Woe unto thee, O land! unto thee, O church! that hast such watchmen, such prophets, that are seers, but not doers! *Corruptio optimi est pessima*—*The best things, when corrupted, become the worst*.

IV. That God will now reckon with them for the sins of their fathers, which they have trod in the steps of, v. 9, 10. 1. They were as bad as their fathers: *They have deeply corrupted themselves*; they are rooted and rivetted in sin; they are far gone in the *depths of Satan* (Isa. xxxi. 6), so that it is next to impossible that they should be recovered; the stain of their corruption is deep, not to be got out; it is as scarlet and crimson, or as the spots of the leopard: and it is their own fault; they have *corrupted themselves*, have polluted and hardened their own hearts, as *in the days of Gibeah*, when the Levite's concubine was abused to death by the men of Gibeah and the whole tribe of Benjamin patronised the villany; that was a time of deep corruption indeed, and such were the present days Lewdness and wickedness

were as impudent and daring now as in the days of Gibeah; and therefore what can be expected but such a vengeance as was then taken on Gibeah? Every tribe is now as bad as the tribe of Benjamin then was, and therefore may expect to be brought as low as that tribe then was. 2. They shall therefore be reckoned with for their fathers' sins: *He will remember their iniquity and visit their sins*, the iniquity they have by kind and by entail, the sin that runs in the blood; *the sin of the father shall now be visited upon the children*. Hence God takes occasion to upbraid them with the degeneracy and apostasy of their ancestors, their perfidiousness and base ingratitude, v. 10. Here observe, (1.) The great honour God put upon Israel when he first formed them into a people: *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness*. He took as much delight and pleasure in them as a poor traveller would do if he found grapes in a wilderness, where he most needed them and least expected them. Or when they were *in the wilderness he found them as grapes*, not precious in themselves, but precious to him, and pleasant as the first-ripe grapes to the lord of the vineyard. They were *precious in his sight, and honourable* (Isa. xliii. 4); he planted them a *choice vine*, a *right seed* (Jer. ii. 21), and found them no better than he himself made them, good grapes at first. *I saw them with pleasure, as the first-ripe in the fig-tree at the first time*. Good people are compared to the *good things that are first ripe*, Jer. xxiv. 2. One then is worth more than many afterwards. This intimates the delight God took in them and in doing them good, not for their sakes, but because he loved their fathers. He preserved them carefully, as a man does the first and choicest fruits of his vineyard. Now when he put all this honour upon them, and they stood so fair for preferment, one would think they should have maintained their excellency; but, (2.) See the great disgrace they put upon themselves. God set them apart for himself as a peculiar people, but they went to Baal-peor, joined with the Moabites in sacrificing to that dirty dunghill deity (Num. xxv. 2, 3), and they *separated themselves unto that shame*, that shameful idol, so Baal-peor was in a particular manner, if (as should seem) the *whoredom* which the people committed with the *daughters of Moab* was a part of the service done to Baal-peor. Note, Whatever those separate themselves to that forsake God it will certainly be a shame to them, first or last. *Their abominations* are here said to be *as they loved*; their practices which were an abomination to God were as the best-beloved of their souls. Or when they had once forsaken God they multiplied *their abominations*, their idols and abominable idolatries, at their pleasure. This was the way of their fathers; God had done well for them, but they had acted ungratefully towards him, and in the same manner had

the present generation *deeply corrupted themselves*.

11 *As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception.* 12 *Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left:* yea, woe also to them when I depart from them! 13 *Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place:* but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer. 14 *Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.* 15 *All their wickedness is in Gilgal:* for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes *are* revolvers. 16 *Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit:* yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay *even* the beloved *fruit* of their womb. 17 *My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations.*

In the foregoing verses we saw the sin of Israel derived from their fathers; here we see the punishment of Israel derived to their children; for, as death entered by sin at first, so it is still entailed with it. We may observe, in these verses,

I. The sin of Ephraim. Some expressions are here which describe that. 1. *They did not hearken to God* (v. 17); they did not give attention to the voice either of his word or of his rod; they did not believe what he said, nor would they be ruled by him. He told them their duty, their interest, their danger, but they regarded him not; all he said to them by his words and by his prophets was to them as a tale that is told; and then no wonder that we hear, 2. *Of the wickedness of their doings* (v. 15), the downright malice that was in their sins; they were not infirmities, but daring presumptions. How can those but do wickedly who will not hearken to the word of God, that would teach and persuade them to do well? And no wonder that there were wicked doings among them when, 3. Their worship was corrupt (v. 15): *All their wickedness is in Gilgal*, which was a place infamous for idolatry, as appears, *ch.* iv. 15; xii. 11; Amos iv. 4; v. 5. It is probable that the idolaters chose that place for their head-quarters because it had been famous in other ages for solemn transactions between God and

Israel, as Josh. v. 2, 10; 1 Sam. x. 8; xi. 15. There, where the source of idolatry was, whence it spread through the kingdom, there it might be said that *all their wickedness* was, for all other wickedness owed its origin to that. Corruptions in worship make way for corruptions in morals. *The mother of harlots is the mother of all other abominations*, Rev. xvii. 5. The learned Grotius conjectures that there is a mystical sense here. Golgotha in Syriac is the same with Gilgal in Hebrew, and therefore he thinks this may have reference to the putting of Christ to death at Golgotha, which was the greatest sin of the Jewish nation, and of which it might truly be said, *All their wickedness* was summed up in that. And no wonder that the people did wickedly, both in worship and conversation, when, 4. *All their princes were revolvers*; the whole succession of the kings of the ten tribes did evil in the sight of the Lord, or all the set of judges and magistrates at this time were wicked; they turned aside to sinful ways and persisted in those ways.

II. The displeasure of God against Ephraim for sin. This is variously expressed here, to show what a provocation sin is to the pure eyes of his glory, and how odious it makes the sinner to him. 1. *He departs from them*, v. 12. When they revolt from him, and withdraw from their allegiance to him, how can they expect but that he should depart from them and withdraw both his protection and his bounty? And well may his threatening be enforced as it is, and made terrible: *Woe also unto them when I depart from them!* Note, Those are in a woeful condition indeed whom God has forsaken. Our weal or woe depends upon the gracious presence of God with us; and, if he goes, all weal goes with him and all woes come upon us. *God has forsaken him; persecute and take him.* Saul knew this when he laid such an emphasis upon this part of his complaint, *The Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me.* Nay, he does not only depart from them, but, 2. He hates them. *In Gilgal, where all their wickedness is, there I hated them.* There, where the abominations of sin are committed, there God abominates the sinners. In Gilgal he had bestowed many tokens of his favour upon their ancestors, but now that is the place where he hates them for their base ingratitude. Nay, he not only hates them, but, 3. *He will love them no more*, will never take them into his favour again; the breach between God and Israel is wide as the sea, which cannot be healed. This agrees with what he had said, (*ch.* i. 6, 7), *I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel, the ten tribes.* 4. He will discard them, and have no more to do with them: *For the wickedness of their doings, I will drive them out of my house.* He will no longer own them as his, or as belonging



to his family in the world; he will turn them out of doors as unfaithful tenants that pay him no rent, as unprofitable servants that do him neither credit nor work. Note, Those that profane God's house can expect no other than to be expelled his house, and no longer suffered to be either lodgers in it or retainers to it. Nay, he will not only drive them out of his house, but, 5. He will drive them far enough (v. 17): *My God will cast them away*, not only out of his house, but out of his sight; he will quite abandon and reject them; they shall be *cast-aways*. God said that he would *drive them out of his house*, and here the prophet seconds it, as one that knew his Master's mind very well: *My God will cast them away*. See with what comfort and pleasure he calls God his God. Note, When others disown God, and are disowned by him, it is a very great satisfaction to good people that they can call God their God, can cheerfully own him and see themselves owned by him—all revolvers, all ruined, yet God is *my God*.

III. The fruit of this displeasure, in the cutting off and abandoning of their posterity, which is the judgment here threatened again and again. Observe here,

1. How numerous Ephraim seemed likely to be. The name *Ephraim* is derived from *fruitfulness*, Gen. xli. 52. Joseph is a *fruitful bough*, Gen. xlix. 22. And Moses's blessing foretold the *ten thousands of Ephraim*, Deut. xxxiii. 17. This was his glory, v. 11. For this he seemed designed by him that appoints the bounds of men's habitation; for *Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, is planted in a pleasant place*, to encourage his increase, which one may expect as from a tree planted by the river's side. Ephraim is as strong and rich as ever Tyre was, and as proud and secure. The Chaldee paraphrase gives this sense of it, *The congregation of Israel, while they observed the law, was like to Tyrus in prosperity and security*.

2. How few Ephraim should be (v. 11): *Their glory shall fly away like a bird*; their children shall be taken away and the hopes of their families cut off. All their glory shall fly *as an eagle towards heaven*, swiftly and irrecoverably. Note, Worldly glory is glory that will fly away; but those that have their God their glory have in him an unfading everlasting glory. Ephraim has been as a fruitful tree. But now *Ephraim is smitten*, is blasted; *their root is dried up*; *they shall bear no fruit*, v. 16. If the root be dried, the branch must wither of course. Observe,

(1.) God's threatening this judgment of the destroying of their children. [1.] They shall perish of themselves by the immediate hand of God (v. 11): They shall *fly away from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception*. Some of their children shall die as soon as they are born; the cradle shall

be presently turned into a coffin. Others of them shall be *still-born*, or the womb shall be their grave, and their death there their mothers' death too. Of others their mothers shall miscarry almost as soon as they have conceived, and they shall be as untimely fruit. See how easily God can, and how justly we are sure he might, root out the whole race of mankind, that degenerate, guilty, obnoxious race, and blot out the name of it from under heaven; it is but doing as he does by Ephraim here, writing them all childless, making all their glory to *fly away from the birth, the womb, and the conception*, drying up their root, that they bear no fruit, and their business is done in a few years. [2.] They shall perish by the hand of their enemies; they shall die violent deaths (v. 12): "*Though they bring up their children to some maturity, though they escape the diseases and deaths which the infant age is liable to, and are thought to be reared past danger, yet will I bereave them* (v. 12), by one judgment or other, so that *there shall not be a man left to build up their families and bear up their name*." Again (v. 13), *Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer*. The mothers shall travail with pain to bear their children, and a great deal of care, and pains, and cost shall be bestowed upon the nursing of them, and when a cruel enemy comes and puts all to the sword, young and old, without mercy, then they seem but as lambs that were all this while fed for the slaughter. Note, It is a great alloy to the comfort parents have in their children that they know not what they have brought them forth and brought them up for, perhaps *for the murderer*, or, which is worse, to be themselves the plagues of their generation. It is threatened again (v. 16), *Though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb*, those children that they are most fond of. Note, The parents' love is no security to the children's lives; nay, sometimes death is commissioned to take the darlings of the family and leave the burdens of it. When sentence was passed upon Israel in the wilderness, that they should all perish there, this mercy was mixed with the wrath, that their children should nevertheless enter into that rest which they through unbelief could not enter into. But this is a total and final rejection; even their children shall all be cut off, and the land shall escheat to the crown, *ob defectum sanguinis—shall be lost for want of heirs*. The Chaldee-paraphrase, and many of the rabbins, by the *murderers* to whom the children were brought forth, understand those that sacrificed their children to Moloch, a sin which was its own punishment, which showed the parents void of bowels and justly left them void of blessings. [3.] Those few that escape and remain shall be dispersed (v. 17): They shall be *wanderers among the nations*; so the remains of the Jews are at

this day, and there is no place in the world where they are a distinct nation.

(2.) The prophet's prayer relating to it (v. 14): *Give them, O Lord! what wilt thou give?* What shall I ask for a people thus doomed to destruction? It is this; since the decree has gone forth, that they must either die from the womb or be brought forth for the murderer, of the two let them rather *die from the womb*. Rather let them have no children than have them to be made miserable; for the same reason, when a total ruin was coming on the Jewish nation, Christ said, *Blessed is the womb that never bore and the paps that never gave suck*, Luke xxiii. 29. "Give therefore a *miscarrying womb and dry breasts*; for it is better to fall into the hands of the Lord, whose mercies are great, than into the hands of man." Note, Those that are childless may with this reconcile themselves to the will of God herein, that the time may come when, if they were not so, they would wish they had been so.

## CHAP. X.

In this chapter, I. The people of Israel are charged with gross corruptions in the worship of God and are threatened with the destruction of their images and altars, ver. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8. II. They are charged with corruptions in the administration of the civil government and are threatened with the ruin of that, ver. 3, 4, 7. III. They are charged with imitating the sins of their fathers, and with security in their own sins, and are threatened with snatching humbling judgments, ver. 9-11. IV. They are earnestly invited to repent and reform, and are threatened with ruin if they did not, ver. 12-15.

**I**SRAEL is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. 2 Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images. 3 For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us? 4 They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field. 5 The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof *that* rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it. 6 It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel. 7 *As for* Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water. 8 The high places also of Aven, the

sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.

Observe, I. What the sins are which are here laid to Israel's charge, the national sins which bring down national judgment. The prophet deals plainly with them; for what good would it do them to be flattered?

1. They were not fruitful in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. Here all their other wickedness began (v. 1): *Israel is an empty vine*. The church of God is fitly compared to a vine, weak, and of an unpromising outside, yet spreading and fruitful; believers are branches of that vine, and partake of its root and fatness. But this was the character of Israel, they were as an *empty vine*, a vine that had no sap or virtue in it, and therefore none of those good fruits produced by it that were expected from it, with which God and man should be honoured. Note, There are many who, though they have not become *degenerate* vines, are yet *empty vines*, have no good in them. A vine is of all trees least serviceable if it do not bear fruit. It is thenceforth good for nothing, Ezek. xv. 3, 5. And those that bring forth no grapes will soon come to bring forth wild grapes; those that do no good will do hurt. He is an *empty vine*, for he brings forth fruit to himself. What good there is in him is not directed to the glory of God, but he takes the praise of it to himself, and prides himself in it. Christians live not to themselves (Rom. xiv. 6), but hypocrites make self their centre; they *eat and drink to themselves*, Zech. vii. 5, 6. Or Israel is by the judgments of God *emptied* and *spoiled* of all his wealth, because he made use of it in the service of his lusts, and not to the honour of God who gave it to him. Note, What we do not rightly employ we may justly expect to be emptied of.

2. They multiplied their altars and images, and the more bountiful God's providence was to them the more prodigal they were in serving their idols: *According to the multitude of his fruit which his land brought forth he has increased the altars, and according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images*. Note, It is a great affront to God, and an abuse of his goodness, when the more mercies we receive from him the more sins we commit against him, and when the more wealth men have the more mischief they do. Should not we be thus abundant in the service of our God, as they were in the service of their idols? As we find our estates increasing, we should proportionably abound the more in works of piety and charity.

3. Their hearts were divided, v. 2. (1.) They were divided among themselves. They were at variance about their idols, some for one, some for another, at variance about their kings, whose separate interests made



parties in the kingdom, and in them their very hearts were divided, and alienated one from another, and there was no such thing as cordial friendship to be found among them; it follows therefore, *Now shall they be found faulty*. Note, The divisions and animosities of a people are the causes of much sin and the presages of ruin. (2.) They were divided between God and their idols. They had a remaining affection in their hearts for God, but a reigning affection for their idols. They *halted between God and Baal*, that was the dividing of their heart. But God is the sovereign of the heart and he will by no means endure a rival; he will either have all or none. Satan, like the pretended mother, says, *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it*; but, if this be yielded to, God says, *Nay, let him take it all*. A heart thus divided will be *found faulty*, and be rejected as treacherous in covenanting with God. Note, A heart divided between God and mammon, though it may trim the matter so as to appear plausible, will, in the day of discovery, be *found faulty*.

4. They made no conscience of what they said and what they did in the most solemn manner, v. 4. (1.) Not of what they said in swearing, which is the most solemn speaking: *They have spoken words*, and words only, for they meant not as they said; they did *verba dare—give words*. They *swore falsely in making a covenant*; they were deceitful in their covenanting with God, the covenant of circumcision, the fair promises they made of reformation when they were in distress; and no marvel if those that were false to their God were false to all mankind. They contracted such a habit of treachery that they broke through the most sacred bonds, and made nothing of them; subjects violated their oaths of allegiance and their kings their coronation-oaths; they broke their leagues with the nations they were in alliance with, nor was any conscience made of contracts between private persons. (2.) Nor of what they did in judgment, which is the most solemn acting. Justice could not take place when men made nothing of forswearing themselves; for thus *judgment*, which should have been a healing medicinal plant and of a sweet smell, *sprang up as hemlock*, which is both nauseous and noxious, *in the furrows of the field*, in the field that was ploughed and furrowed for good corn. Note, God is greatly offended with corruptions, not only in his own worship, but in the administration of justice between man and man, and the dishonesty of a people shall be the ground of his controversy with them as well as their idolatry and impiety; for God's laws are intended for man's benefit and the good of the community, as well as for God's honour, and the profanation of courts of justice shall be avenged as surely as the profanation of temples.

II. What the judgments are with which

Israel should be punished for these sins; they sinned both in civil and religious matters, and in both they shall be punished. 1. They shall have no joy of their kings and of their government. Because justice is turned into oppression, therefore those who are entrusted with the administration of it, and should be blessings to the state, shall be complained of as the burdens of it (v. 3), and those that would not rule their people well shall not be able to protect them: *Now they shall say*, "*We have no king*, that is, we are as if we had none, we have none to do us any good nor stand us in any stead, none to keep us from destroying ourselves or being destroyed by our enemies, none to preserve the public peace nor to fight our battles; and justly has this come to us. *Because we feared not the Lord*, when we were safe under the protection of our kings, therefore we are rejected by him, and then *what shall a king do for us?* What good can we expect from a king when we have forfeited the favour of our God?" Note, Those that cast off the fear of God are not likely to have joy of any of their creature-comforts; nor will men's loyalty to their prince befriend them without religion, for, though that may engage him to be for them, what good will that do them if God be against them? Those that keep themselves in the fear and favour of God may say, with triumph, "What can the greatest of men do against us?" But those that throw themselves out of his protection must say, with despair, "What can the greatest of men do for us?" He was a king that said, *If the Lord do not help thee, whence should I help thee?* Yet he is a fool that says, If a king cannot help us, we must perish (as these intimate here), for God can do that for us which kings cannot. Time was when they doted upon having a king: but now what can a king (who, they thought, could do any thing) do for them? God can make people sick of those creature-confidences which they were most fond of. This is their complaint when their king is disabled to help them, yet this is not the worst; their civil government shall not only be weakened, but quite destroyed (v. 7): *As for Samaria*, the royal city, which is now almost all that is left, *her king is cut off as the foam from the water*. The foam swims uppermost, and makes a great show upon the face of the water, yet it is but a heap of bubbles raised by the troubling of the water. Such were the kings of Israel, after their revolt from the house of David, a mere scum; their government had no foundation. No better are the greatest of kings when they set up in opposition to God; when God comes to contend with them by his judgments he can as easily disperse and dissolve them, and bring them to nothing, as the froth upon the water. 2. They shall have no joy of their idols and of their worship of them. And miserable is

the case of that people whose gods fail them when their kings do. (1.) The idols they had made, and the altars they had set up in honour of them, should be broken down, and spoiled, and carried away, as common plunder, by the victorious enemy: *He shall break down their altars.* God shall do it by the hand of the Assyrians: the Assyrians shall do it by order from God. *He shall spoil their images,* v. 2. Note, What men make idols of it is just with God to *break down and spoil.* But the calf at Bethel was the sovereign idol; it was this that the inhabitants of Samaria doted most upon; now it is here foretold that this should be destroyed: *The glory of it has departed from it* (v. 5) when it is thrown down and defaced, no more to be worshipped; but this is not all: *It shall also be carried to Assyria* (as some think that the calf at Dan was some time before) *for a present to king Jareb.* It was carried to him as a rich booty (for it was a golden calf, and probably adorned with the gifts and offerings of its worshippers) and as a trophy of victory over their enemies; and what more glorious trophy could they bring than this, or more incontestable proof of an absolute conquest? Thus it is said, *The sin of Israel shall be destroyed* (v. 8), that is, the idols which they made the matter of their sin; it is said of them, *They became a sin to all Israel,* 1 Kings xii. 30. Note, If the grace of God prevail not to destroy the love of sin in us, it is just that the providence of God should destroy the food and fuel of sin about us. With the idols, *the high places* shall be destroyed, *the high places of Aven,* that is, of *Bethaven* (v. 5) or *Bethel*; it was called *the house of God* (so Bethel signifies), but now it is called *the house of iniquity*, nay, *iniquity itself.* The kings did not, as they ought to have done, *take away the high places* by the sword of justice, and therefore God will take them away by the sword of war; so that *the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars*, that is, they shall lie in ruins. Their altars, while they stood, were as thorns and thistles, offensive to God and good men, and fruits of sin and the curse; justly therefore are they buried in thorns and thistles. (2.) The destruction of their idols, their altars, and their high places, shall be the occasion of sorrow, and shame, and terror to them. [1.] It shall be an occasion of sorrow to them. When the calf at Bethel is broken *the people thereof shall mourn over it.* They looked upon the calf to be the protector of their nation, and, when that was gone, thought they must all be undone, which made the poor ignorant people that were deluded into the love of it lament bitterly, as Micah did (Judg. xviii. 24), *You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* The priests that had rejoiced in it shall now mourn for it with the people. Note, Whatever men make a god of they will mourn

for the loss of; and an inordinate sorrow for the loss of any worldly good is a sign we made an idol of it. They used to be very merry in the worship of their idols, but now they shall mourn over them; for sinful mirth shall, sooner or later, be turned into mourning. [2.] It shall be an occasion of shame to them (v. 6): *Ephraim shall receive shame* when he sees the gods he trusted to carried into captivity, and *Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel*, in putting such confidence in them and paying such adoration to them. God's ark and altars were never thrown down till the people rejected them; but the idolatrous altars were thrown down when the people were doting on them, which shows that the contempt of the former, and the veneration for the latter, were the sins for which God visited them. [3.] It shall be an occasion of fear to them (v. 5): *The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear*; they shall be in pain for their gods and afraid of losing them; or, rather, they shall be in pain for themselves and their children and families, when they see the judgments of God breaking in upon them and beginning with their idols, as he *executed judgment against the gods of Egypt*, Exod. xii. 12. Thus idolaters are brought in trembling when God arises to *shake terribly the earth*, Isa. ii. 21. And here (v. 8), *They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.* The supporters of idolatry (Rev. vi. 15, 16) are brought in calling thus in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from God's wrath.

9 O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them. 10 *It is* in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows. 11 And Ephraim *is as* a heifer *that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn*; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plough, and Jacob shall break his clods. 12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for *it is* time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. 13 Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men. 14 Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be



spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon *her* children. 15 So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off.

Here, I. They are put in mind of the sins of their fathers and predecessors, for which God would now reckon with them. It was told them (*ch.* ix. 9) that they had *corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah*, and here (*v.* 9), *O Israel! thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah*. Not only the wickedness that was committed in that age is revived in this, and reacted, a copy from that original, but the wickedness that was committed in that age has been continued in a constant series and succession through all the intervening ages down to this; so that the measure of iniquity had been long in filling; and still there had been made additions to it. Or, "*Thou hast sinned more than in the days of Gibeah*" (so it may be read); "the sins of this age exceed those of the worst of former ages. The case was bad then, for there they stood; the criminals stood in their own defence, and the tribes of Israel, who undertook to chastise them for their wickedness, were *at a stand*, when both in the first and in the second battle the malefactors were the victors; and the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them till the third engagement, and then did not overtake them all, for 600 made their escape. But thy sin is worse than theirs, and therefore thou canst not expect but that the battle against the children of iniquity should overtake thee, and overcome thee."

II. They have warning given them, fair warning, of the judgments of God that were coming upon them, *v.* 10. God had hitherto pitied and spared them. Though they had been very provoking, he had a mind to try whether they would be wrought upon by patience and forbearance; but now, "*It is in my desire that I should chastise them*"; it is what I have a purpose of and will take pleasure in." He will rejoice over them to do them hurt. Deut. xxviii. 63. Note, Because God does not desire the death and ruin of sinners, therefore he does desire their chastisement. And see what the chastisement is: *The people shall be gathered against them*, as all the other tribes were against Benjamin in the battle of Gibeah. One of the rabbins thus descants upon it: "Because they receive not chastisement from me by my prophets, who in my name rebuked them, I will chastise them by the hands of the people who shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows," that is, when they shall think to fortify themselves, as it were, within a double

entrenchment. Or, *When I shall bind them for their two transgressions* (so the margin reads it), meaning their corporal and spiritual whoredom, which they are so often charged with, or the *two calves* at Dan and Bethel, or those two great evils mentioned Jer. ii. 13. Or, *When I shall bind them to their two furrows*, that is, bring them into servitude to the Assyrians, who shall keep them under the yoke as oxen in the plough, who are bound to the two furrows up the field and down it, and dare not, for fear of the goad, stir a step out of them. The Chaldee says, Those that are gathered against them shall exercise dominion over them, in like manner as a pair of heifers are tied to their two furrows. Thus those that would not be God's freemen shall be their enemies' slaves, and shall be made to know the difference between God's service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries, 2 Chron. xii. 8.

III. They are made to know that their unacquaintedness with sufferings and hardships should not excuse them from a very miserable captivity, *v.* 11. See how nice, and tender, and delicate, Ephraim is; he is as a heifer that is taught to tread out the corn, and loves that work, because, being not allowed to be muzzled, she has liberty to eat at pleasure, and the work itself was dry and easy, and both its own diversion and its own wages. "But," says God, "I have a yoke to put upon her fair neck, fair as it is. I will make Ephraim to ride, that is, I will tame them, or cause them to be ridden by the Assyrians and other conquerors that shall rule them with rigour, as men do the beasts they ride upon (Ps. lxi. 12); and Judah too shall be made to plough, and Jacob to break the clods," that is, they shall be used hardly, but not so hardly as Ephraim. Note, It is just with God to make those know what hardships mean that indulge themselves too much in their own ease and pleasure. The learned Dr. Pocock inclines to another sense of these words, as intimating the tender gentle methods God took with this people, to bring them into obedience to his law, as a reason why they should return to that obedience; he had managed them as the husbandman does his cattle that he trains up for service. Ephraim being as a docile heifer, fit to be employed, God took hold of her fair neck, to accustom her to the hand, harnessed her, or put the yoke of his commandments upon her, gave his people Israel a law, that, being trained up in his institutions, they might not be tempted by the usages of the heathen; he had used all fair and likely means with them to keep them in their obedience, had set Judah to plough and Jacob to break the clods, had employed them in the observance of precepts proper for them; and yet they would not be retained in their obedience, but started aside.

IV. They are invited and encouraged to return to God by prayer, repentance, and reformation, v. 12, 13. See *here*,

1. The duties they are called to. They are *God's husbandry* (1 Cor. iii. 9), and the duties are expressed in language borrowed from the husbandman's calling. If they would not be brought into bondage by their oppressors, let them return to God's service. (1.) Let them *break up the fallow ground*; let them cleanse their hearts from all corrupt affections and lusts, which are as weeds and thorns, and let them be humbled for their sins, and be of a broken and contrite spirit in the sense of them; let them be full of sorrow and shame at the remembrance of them, and prepare to receive the divine precepts, as the ground that is ploughed is to receive the seed, that it may take root. See Jer. iv. 3. (2.) Let them *sow to themselves in righteousness*; let them return to the practice of good works, according to the law of God, which is the rule of righteousness; let them abound in works of piety towards God, and of justice and charity towards one another, and herein let them *sow to the Spirit*, as the apostle speaks, Gal. vi. 7, 8. Every action is seed sown. Let them *sow in righteousness*; let them sow what they should sow, do what they should do, and they themselves shall have the benefit of it. (3.) Let them *seek the Lord*; let them look up to him for his grace, and beg of him to bless the *seed sown*. The husbandman must plough and sow with an eye to God, asking of him rain in the season thereof.

2. The arguments used for the pressing of these duties. Consider, (1.) It is time to do it; it is *high time*. The husbandman sows in seed-time, and, if that time be far spent, he applies to the work with the more diligence. Note, Seeking the Lord is to be every day's work, but there are some special occasions given by the providence and grace of God when it is, in a particular manner, time to seek him. (2.) If we do our part, God will do his. If we *sow to ourselves in righteousness*—if we be careful and diligent to do our duty, in a dependence upon his grace—he will shower down his grace upon us, will *rain righteousness*, the very thing that those need most who are to *sow in righteousness*; for *by the grace of God we are what we are*. Some apply it to Christ, who should come in the fulness of time, and for whose coming they must prepare themselves; he shall come as *the Lord our righteousness*, and shall *rain righteousness upon us*, that everlasting righteousness which he has brought in; he will grant us of it abundantly. It is foretold (Ps. lxxii. 6) that *he shall come down like rain*. (3.) If we *sow in righteousness*, we shall *reap in mercy*, which agrees with that promise, If we *sow to the Spirit*, we shall *of the Spirit reap life everlasting*. We shall reap according to the measure of mercy (so the word is); it shall be a great reward, according to the

*riches of mercy*, such a reward, not as becomes such mean creatures as we are to receive, but as becomes a God of infinite mercy to give, a reward, *not of debt, but of grace*. We reap not in merit, but in mercy. It is what is sown; God gives a body as it has pleased him. (4.) We have *ploughed wickedness and reaped iniquity*; and the time *past of our life may suffice* that we have done so, v. 13. "You have taken a great deal of pains in the service of sin, have laboured at it in the very fire; and will you grudge to bear the burden and heat of the day in God's service and in doing that which will be for your own advantage? You have done much to damn your souls; will you not undo it again, and do something to save them?" (5.) We never got any thing in the service of sin. They have *ploughed wickedness* (that is, they have done the drudgery of sin), and they have *reaped iniquity*, that is, they have got all that is to be got by it; they have carried it on to the *harvest*, and what the better? It is all a cheat. *They have eaten the fruit of lies*, fruit that is but a lie, which looks fair, but is rotten within; the *works of darkness* are *unfruitful works*, Eph. v. 11; Rom. vi. 21. Even the gains of sin yield the sinner no satisfaction. (6.) As our comforts, so our confidences, in the service of sin will certainly fail us: "*Thou didst trust in thy ways, in the multitude of thy mighty men*; thou hast stayed thyself upon creatures, thy own power and policy, and therefore hast ventured to plough wickedness, and thy hopes have deceived thee; come therefore, and seek the Lord, and thy hope in him shall not deceive thee."

V. They are threatened with utter destruction, both for their carnal practices and for their carnal confidences, v. 14, 15. *Therefore*, because thou hast sown wickedness, and trusted in thy own way, *a tumult shall arise among thy people*, either by insurrections at home or invasions from abroad, either of which will put a kingdom into confusion and make a noise, much more both together. 1. Their cities and strongholds shall be a prey to the enemy: *The fortresses which they confided in, and in which they had laid up their effects, shall be seized and rifled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle*. This refers to some event that had lately happened, not elsewhere recorded; and probably Shalman is the same with Shalmaneser king of Assyria, who had lately put some town, or castle, or house (*Beth-arbel is the house of Arbel*), under *military execution*, which perhaps he used with severity in the beginning of his conquests, to terrify other garrisons into a speedy surrender at the first summons. God tells them that thus Samaria should be *spoiled*. 2. The inhabitants shall be put to the sword, as it was at *Beth-arbel*; when it was taken the *mother was dashed in pieces upon her children*, that is, they were both dashed in pieces together by the fury of the



soldiers. See what cruel work war makes. *Jusque datum sceleri—Wickedness has free course.* It is strange that any of the human race could be so inhuman; but see what comes of sin. *Homo homini lupus—Man is a wolf to man,* and then, *Homo homini agnus—Man is a lamb to man.* 3. Even royal blood shall be mingled with common gore: *In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off,* v. 15. Hoshea was the last king of Israel; in him the whole kingdom was cut off and came to a period; it may refer either to him or to some of his predecessors that were cut off by treachery. It shall be done *in a morning*, in a very little time, as suddenly as the dawning of the morning, or at the time appointed, for so the morning comes, punctually at its time. Or *in the morning*, when they think the night of calamity is over, and expect a returning day, then shall all their hopes be dashed by the sudden cutting off of their king, v. 7. Kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall die like men. And (*lastly*) what does all this desolation owe its rise to? What is the spring of this bloodshed? He tells us (v. 15): *So shall Bethel do unto you.* Bethel was the place where one of the calves was; Gilgal, where *all their wickedness* is said to have been, was hard by; there was their *great wickedness*, the *evil of their evil* (so the word is), the sum and quintessence of their sin; and that was it that *did this to them*, that made all this havoc, for that was it that provoked God to bring it upon them. He does not say, "So shall the king of Assyria do to you;" but, "So shall Bethel do to you." Note, Whatever mischief is done to us it is sin that does it. Are the fortresses spoiled? Are the women and children murdered? Is the king cut off? It is sin that does all this. It is sin that ruins soul, body, estate, all. *So shall Bethel do unto you.* It is *thy own wickedness that corrects thee and by backslidings that reprove thee.*

## CHAP. XI.

In this chapter we have, I. The great goodness of God towards his people Israel, and the great things he had done for them, ver. 1, 3, 4. II. Their ungrateful conduct towards him, notwithstanding his favours towards them, ver. 2-4, 7, 12. III. Threatenings of wrath against them for their ingratitude and treachery, ver. 5, 6. IV. Mercy remembered in the midst of wrath, ver. 8, 9. V. Promises of what God would yet do for them, ver. 10, 11. VI. An honourable character given of Judah, ver. 12.

**W**HEN Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. 2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. 3 I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. 4 I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid

meat unto them. 5 He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. 6 And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. 7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him.

Here we find,

I. God very gracious to Israel. They were a people for whom he had done more than for any people under heaven, and to whom he had given more, which they are here, I will not say upbraided with (for God gives, and upbraids not), but put in mind of, as an aggravation of their sin and an encouragement to repentance. 1. He had a kindness for them when they were young (v. 1): *When Israel was a child then I loved him*; when they first began to multiply into a nation in Egypt God then set his love upon them, and chose them because he loved them, because he would love them, Deut. vii. 7, 8. When they were weak and helpless as children, foolish and froward as children, when they were outcasts, and children exposed, then God loved them; he pitied them, and testified his goodwill to them; he bore them as the nurse does the sucking child, nourished them, and suffered their manners. Note, Those that have grown up, nay, those that have grown old, ought often to reflect upon the goodness of God to them in their childhood. 2. He delivered them out of the house of bondage: *I called my son out of Egypt*, because a son, because a beloved son. When God demanded Israel's discharge from Pharaoh he called them *his son*, his *first-born*. Note, Those whom God loves he calls out of the bondage of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of his children. These words are said to have been fulfilled in Christ, when, upon the death of Herod, he and his parents were called out of Egypt (Matt. ii. 15), so that the words have a double aspect, speaking historically of the calling of Israel out of Egypt and prophetically of the bringing of Christ thence; and the former was a type of the latter, and a pledge and earnest of the many and great favours God had in reserve for that people, especially the sending of his Son into the world, and the bringing him again into the land of Israel when they had unkindly driven him out, and he might justly never have returned. The calling of Christ out of Egypt was a figure of the calling of all that are his, through him, out of spiritual slavery. 3. He gave them a good education, took care of them, took pains with them, not only as a father or tutor, but, such is the condescension of divine grace, as a mother

or nurse (v. 3): *I taught Ephraim also to go*, as a child in leading-strings is taught. When they were in the wilderness God led them by the pillar of cloud and fire, showed them the way in which they should go, and bore them up, *taking them by the arms*. He taught them to go in the way of his commandments, by the institutions of the ceremonial law, which were as tutors and governors to that people under age. He took them by the arms, to guide them, that they might not stray, and to hold them up, that they might not stumble and fall. God's spiritual Israel are thus supported. *Thou hast holden me by my right hand*, Ps. lxxiii. 23. 4. When any thing was amiss with them, or they were ever so little out of order, he was their physician: "*I healed them*"; I not only took a tender care of them (a friend may do that), but wrought an effectual cure: it is a God only that can do that. *I am the Lord that healeth thee* (Exod. xv. 26), that redresseth all thy grievances." 5. He brought them into his service by mild and gentle methods (v. 4): *I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love*. Note, It is God's work to draw poor souls to himself; and none can come to him except he draw them, John vi. 44. He draws, (1.) *With the cords of a man*, with such cords as men draw with that have a principle of humanity, or such cords as men are drawn with; he dealt with them *as men*, in an equitable rational way, in an easy gentle way, *with the cords of Adam*. He dealt with them as with Adam in innocency, bringing them at once into a paradise, and into covenant with himself. (2.) *With bands of love, or cart-ropes of love*. This word signifies stronger cords than the former. He did not drive them by force into his service, whether they would or no, nor rule them with rigour, nor detain them by violence, but his attractives were all loving and endearing, all sweet and gentle, that he might overcome them with kindness. Moses, whom he made their guide, was the meekest man in the world. *Kindnesses* among men we commonly call *obligations*, or *bonds*, bonds of love. Thus God draws with the savour of his good ointments (Cant. i. 4), draws with lovingkindness, Jer. xxxi. 3. Thus God deals with us, and we must deal in like manner with those that are under our instruction and government, deal rationally and mildly with them. 6. He eased them of the burdens they had been long groaning under: *I was to them as those that take off the yoke on their jaws*, alluding to the care of the good husbandman, who is merciful to his beast, and will not tire him with hard and constant labour. Probably, in those times, the yoke on the neck of the oxen was fastened with some bridle, or headstall, over the jaws, which muzzled the mouth of the ox. Israel in Egypt were thus restrained from the enjoyments of their comforts and constrained to hard labour; but God eased them, *removed their shoulder from the burden*, Ps.

lxxxii. 6. Note, Liberty is a great mercy, especially out of bondage. 7. He supplied them with food convenient. In Egypt they fared hard, but, when God brought them out, he *laid meat unto them*, as the husbandman, when he has unyoked his cattle, foddres them. God rained manna about their camp, bread from heaven, angels' food; other creatures *seek their meat*, but God laid meat to his own people, as we do to our children, was himself their caterer and carver, anticipated them with the blessings of goodness.

II. Here is Israel very ungrateful to God.

1. They were deaf and disobedient to his voice. He spoke to them by his messengers, Moses and his other prophets, called them from their sins, called them to himself, to their work and duty; but *as they called them so they went from them*; they rebelled in those particular instances wherein they were admonished; the more pressing and importunate the prophets were with them, to persuade them to that which was good, the more refractory they were, and the more resolute in their evil ways, disobeying for disobedience-sake. This foolishness is bound in the hearts of children, who, as soon as they are taught to go, will go from those that call them.

2. They were fond of idols, and worshipped them: They *sacrificed to Baalim*, first one Baal and then another, and *burnt incense to graven images*, though they were called to by the prophets of the Lord again and again not to do this abominable thing which he hated. Idolatry was the sin which from the beginning, and all along, had most easily beset them.

3. They were regardless of God, and of his favours to them: *They knew not that I healed them*. They looked only at Moses and Aaron, the instruments of their relief, and, when any thing was amiss, quarrelled with them, but looked not through them to God who employed them. Or, When God corrected them, and kept them under a severe discipline, they understood not that it was for their good, and that God thereby healed them, and it was necessary for the perfecting of their cure, else they would have been better reconciled to the methods God took. Note, Ignorance is at the bottom of ingratitude, *ch. ii. 8*.

4. They were strongly inclined to apostasy. This is the blackest article in the charge (v. 7): *My people are bent to backsliding from me*. Every word here is aggravating. (1.) They *backslide*. There is no hold of them, no stedfastness in them; they seem to come forward, towards God, but they quickly slide back again, and are as a deceitful bow. (2.) They *backslide from me*, from God, the chief good, the fountain of life and living waters, from their God, their owner, ruler, and benefactor, from God who never turned from them, nor was as a wilderness to them. (3.) They are *bent to backslide*;



they are ready to sin; there is in their nature a propensity to that which is evil; at the best they hang in suspense between God and the world, so that a little thing serves to draw them the wrong way; they are forward to close with every temptation. It also intimates that they are resolute in sin; their hearts are *fully set in them to do evil*; the bias is strong that way; and they persist in their backslidings, whatever is said or done to stop them; and yet, (4.) "They are, in profession, *my people*. They are *called by my name*, and profess relation to me; they are mine, whom I have done much for and expect much from, whom I have *nourished and brought up, as children*, and yet they backslide from me." Note, In our repentance we ought to lament not only our backslidings, but our *bent to backslide*, not only our actual transgressions, but our original corruption, the sin that dwells in us, the carnal mind.

5. They were strangely averse to repentance and reformation. Here are two expressions of their obstinacy:—(1.) *They refused to return, v. 5.* So much were they bent to backslide that, though they could not but find, upon trial, the folly of their backslidings, and that when they forsook God they changed for the worse, yet they went on forwardly. *I have loved strangers, and after them I will go.* They were commanded to return, were courted and entreated to return, were promised that if they would they should be kindly received, but they refused. (2.) *Though they called them to the Most High.* God's prophets and ministers called them to return to the God from whom they had revolted, to the most high God, from whom they had sunk into this wretched degeneracy; they called them from the worship of the idols, which were so much below them, and the worship of which was therefore their disparagement, to the true God, who was so much above them, and the worship of whom was therefore their preferment; they called them from this earth to high and heavenly things; but they called in vain. *None at all would exalt him.* Though he is the most high God they would not acknowledge him to be so, would do nothing to honour him nor give him the glory due to his name. Or, They would not *exalt themselves*, would not rise out of that state of apostasy and misery into which they had precipitated themselves; but there they contentedly lay still, would not lift up their heads nor lift up their souls. Note, God's faithful ministers have taken a great deal of pains, to no purpose, with backsliding children, have called them to the Most High; but none would stir, *none at all would exalt him.*

III. Here is God very angry, and justly so, with Israel; see what are the tokens of God's displeasure with which they are here threatened. 1. God, who brought them out of Egypt, to take them for a people to himself, since they would not be faithful to him,

shall bring them into a worse condition than he at first found them in (v. 5): "*He shall not return into the land of Egypt*, though that was a house of bondage grievous enough; but he shall go into a harder service, for *the Assyrian shall be his king*, who will use him worse than ever Pharaoh did." They shall not return into Egypt, which lies near, where they may hear often from their own country, and whence they may hope shortly to return to it again; but they shall be carried into Assyria, which lies much more remote, and where they shall be cut off from all correspondence with their own land and from all hopes of returning to it, and justly, because *they refused to return.* Note, Those that will not return to the duties they have left cannot expect to return to the comforts they have lost. 2. God, who gave them Canaan, that good land, and a very safe and comfortable settlement in it, shall bring his judgments upon them there, which shall make their habitation unsafe and uncomfortable (v. 6): *The sword shall come upon them*, the sword of war, the sword of a foreign enemy, prevailing against them and triumphing over them. (1.) This judgment shall spread far. The sword shall fasten upon their *cities*, those nests of people and store-houses of wealth; it shall likewise reach to their *branches*, the country villages (so some), the citizens themselves (so others), or the *bars* (so the word signifies) and gates of their city, or all the branches of their revenue and wealth, or their children, the branches of their families. (2.) It shall last long: It shall *abide on their cities*. David thought *three months* flying before his enemies was the only judgment of the three that was to be excepted against; but this *sword* shall abide much longer than three months on the cities of Israel. They continued their rebellions against God, and therefore God continued his judgments on them. (3.) It shall *make a full end*: It shall *consume their branches, and devour them*, and lay all waste, and this *because of their own counsels*, that is, because they would have their own way, both in worship and conversation, would do as they listed, and pursue their own projects, which God therefore, in a way of righteous judgment, gave them up to. Note, The confusion of sinners is owing to their contrivance. God's counsels would have saved them, but their own counsels ruined them.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? *how* shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? *how* shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. 9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I *am* God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst

of thee: and I will not enter into the city. 10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. 11 They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. 12 Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.

In these verses we have,

I. God's wonderful backwardness to destroy Israel (v. 8, 9): *How shall I give thee up?* Here observe,

1. God's gracious debate within himself concerning Israel's case, a debate between justice and mercy, in which victory plainly inclines to mercy's side. Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth! at the glory of God's goodness. Not that there are any such struggles in God as there are in us, or that he is ever fluctuating or unresolved; no, he is in one mind, and knows it; but they are expressions after the manner of men, designed to show what severity the sin of Israel had deserved, and yet how divine grace would be glorified in sparing them notwithstanding. The connexion of this with what goes before is very surprising; it was said of Israel (v. 7) that they were *bent to backslide from God*, that though they were called to him they *would not exalt him*, upon which, one would think, it should have followed, "Now I am determined to destroy them, and never show them mercy any more." No, such is the sovereignty of mercy, such the freeness, the fullness, of divine grace, that it follows immediately, *How shall I give thee up?* See here, (1.) The proposals that justice makes concerning Israel, the suggestion of which is here implied. Let Ephraim be given up, as an incorrigible son is given up to be disinherited, as an incurable patient is given over by his physician. Let him be given up to ruin. Let Israel be delivered into the enemy's hand, as a lamb to the lion to be torn in pieces; let them be made as Admah and set as Zeboim, the two cities that with Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone rained from heaven upon them; let them be utterly and irreparably ruined, and be made as like these cities in desolation as they have been in sin. Let that curse which is written in the law be executed upon them, that the *whole land shall be brimstone and salt, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim*, Deut. xxix. 23. Ephraim and Israel deserve to be thus abandoned, and God will do them no wrong if he deal thus with them. (2.) The opposition that mercy makes to these

proposals: *How shall I do it?* As the tender father reasons with himself, "How can I cast off my untoward son? for he is my son, though he be untoward; how can I find in my heart to do it?" Thus, "Ephraim has been a dear son, a pleasant child: *How can I do it?*" He is ripe for ruin; judgments stand ready to seize him; there wants nothing but *giving him up*, but I cannot do it. They have been a people near unto me; there are yet some good among them; theirs are the children of the covenant; if they be ruined, the enemy will triumph; it may be they will yet repent and reform; and therefore how can I do it?" Note, The God of heaven is slow to anger, and is especially loth to abandon a people to utter ruin that have been in special relation to him. See how mercy works upon the mention of those severe proceedings: *My heart is turned within me*, as we say, Our heart fails us, when we come to do a thing that is against the grain with us. God speaks as if he were conscious to himself of a strange striving of affections in compassion to Israel; as Lam. i. 20, *My bowels are troubled; my heart is turned within me*. As it follows here, *My repentings are kindled together*. His bowels yearned towards them, and *his soul was grieved* for their sin and misery, Judg. x. 16. Compare Jer. xxxi. 20. *Since I spoke against him my bowels are troubled for him*. When God was to give up his Son to be a sacrifice for sin, and a Saviour for sinners, he did not say, *How shall I give him up?* No, he *spared not his own Son*; it *pleased the Lord to bruise him*; and therefore God spared not him, that he might spare us. But this is only the language of the day of his patience; when men have sinned that away, and the great day of his wrath comes, then no difficulty is made of it; nay, *I will laugh at their calamity*.

2. His gracious determination of this debate. After a long contest mercy in the issue rejoices against judgment, has the last word, and carries the day, v. 9. It is decreed that the reprieve shall be lengthened out yet longer, and *I will not now execute the fierceness of my anger*, though I am angry; though they shall not go altogether unpunished, yet he will mitigate the sentence and abate the rigour of it. He will show himself to be justly angry, but not implacably so; they shall be corrected, but not consumed. *I will not return to destroy Ephraim*; the judgments that have been inflicted shall not be repeated, shall not go so deep as they have deserved. He will not return to destroy, as soldiers, when they have pillaged a town once, return a second time, to take more, as when *what the palmer-worm has left the locust has eaten*. It is added, in the close of the verse, "*I will not enter into the city*, into Samaria, or any other of their cities; I will not enter into them as an enemy, utterly to destroy them and lay them waste, as I did the cities of Admah and Zeboim."



3. The ground and reason of this determination: *For I am God and not man, the Holy One of Israel.* To encourage them to hope that they shall find mercy, consider, (1.) What he is in himself: *He is God, and not man*, as in other things, so in pardoning sin and sparing sinners. If they had offended a man like themselves, he would not, he could not have borne it; his passion would have overpowered his compassion, and he would have executed the fierceness of his anger; but *I am God, and not man.* He is *Lord of his anger*, whereas men's anger commonly lords it over them. If an earthly prince were in such a strait between justice and mercy, he would be at a loss how to compromise the matter between them; but he who is God, and not man, knows how to find out an expedient to secure the honour of his justice and yet advance the honour of his mercy. Man's compassions are nothing in comparison with the tender mercies of our God, whose thoughts and ways, in receiving returning sinners, are as much above ours as heaven is above the earth, Isa. lv. 9. Note, It is a great encouragement to our hope in God's mercies to remember that he is *God, and not man.* He is *the Holy One.* One would think this were a reason why he should reject such a provoking people. No; God knows how to spare and pardon poor sinners, not only without any reproach to his holiness, but very much to the honour of it, as he is *faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, and therein declares his righteousness, now Christ has purchased the pardon and he has promised it. (2.) What he is to them; he is *the Holy One in the midst of thee*; his holiness is engaged for the good of his church, and even in this corrupt and degenerate land and age there were some that gave thanks at the remembrance of his holiness, and he required of them all to be *holy as he is*, Lev. xix. 2. As long as we have the *Holy One in the midst of us* we are safe and well; but woe to us when he leaves us! Note, Those who submit to the influence may take the comfort of God's holiness.

II. Here is his wonderful forwardness to do good for Israel, which appears in this, that he will qualify them to receive the good he designs for them (v. 10, 11): *They shall walk after the Lord.* This respects the same favour with that (ch. iii. 5), *They shall return, and seek the Lord their God*; it is spoken of the ten tribes, and had its accomplishment, in part, in the return of some of them with those of the two tribes in Ezra's time; but it had its more full accomplishment in God's spiritual Israel, the gospel-church, brought together and incorporated by the gospel of Christ. The ancient Jews referred it to the time of the Messiah; the learned Dr. Pocock looks upon it as a prophecy of Christ's coming to preach the gospel to the dispersed children of Israel, the children of God that were scattered abroad. And then

observe, 1. How they were to be called and brought together: *The Lord shall roar like a lion.* The word of the Lord (so says the Chaldee) shall be as a lion that roars. Christ is called *the lion of the tribe of Judah*, and his gospel, in the beginning of it, was *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*. When Christ cried with a loud voice it was as *when a lion roared*, Rev. x. 3. The voice of the gospel was heard afar, as the *roaring of a lion*, and it was a *mighty voice*. See Joel iii. 16. 2. What impression this call should make upon them, such an impression as the roaring of a lion makes upon all the beasts of the forest: *When he shall roar then the children shall tremble.* See Amos iii. 8, *The lion has roared; the Lord God has spoken*; and then *who will not fear?* When those whose hearts the gospel reached trembled, and were astonished, and cried out, *What shall we do?*—when they were by it put upon working out their salvation, and worshipping God with fear and trembling, then this promise was fulfilled. *The children shall tremble from the west.* The dispersed Jews were carried eastward, to Assyria and Babylon, and those that returned came from the east; therefore this seems to have reference to the calling of the Gentiles that lay westward from Canaan, for that way especially the gospel spread. They shall tremble; they shall move and come with trembling, with care and haste, *from the west*, from the nations that lay that way, to the mountain of the Lord (Isa. ii. 3), to the gospel-Jerusalem, upon hearing the alarm of the gospel. The apostle speaks of *mighty signs and wonders* that were wrought by the preaching of the gospel from *Jerusalem round about to Illyricum*, Rom. xv. 19. Then the children trembled from the west. And, whereas Israel after the flesh was dispersed in Egypt and Assyria, it is promised that they shall be effectually summoned thence (v. 11): *They shall tremble*; they shall come trembling, and with all haste, *as a bird upon the wing, out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria*; a dove is noted for swift and constant flight, especially when she flies to her windows, which the flocking of Jews and Gentiles to the church is here compared to, as it is Isa. lx. 8. Wherever those are that belong to the election of grace—east, west, north, or south—they shall hear the joyful sound, and be wrought upon by it; those of Egypt and Assyria shall come together; those that lay most remote from each other shall meet in Christ, and be incorporated in the church. Of the uniting of Egypt and Assyria, it was prophesied, Isa. xix. 23. 3. What effect these impressions should have upon them. Being *moved with fear*, they shall flee to the ark: *They shall walk after the Lord, after the service of the Lord* (so the Chaldee); they shall take the Lord Christ for their leader and commander; they shall enlist themselves under him as the captain

of their salvation, and give up themselves to the direction of the Spirit as their guide by the word; they shall *leave all to follow Christ*, as becomes *disciples*. Note, Our holy trembling at the word of Christ will draw us to him, not drive us from him. When he *roars like a lion* the slaves tremble and flee from him, the children tremble and flee to him. 4. What entertainment they shall meet with at their return (v. 11): *I will place them in their houses* (all those that come at the gospel-call shall have a place and a name in the gospel-church, in the particular churches which are their houses, to which they pertain; they shall dwell in God, and be at home in him, both easy and safe, as a man in his own house; they shall have mansions, for there are many in *our Father's house*), in his tabernacle on earth and his temple in heaven, in *everlasting habitations*, which may be called *their houses*, for they are the *lot* they shall stand in *at the end of the days*.

III. Here is a sad complaint of the treachery of Ephraim and Israel, which may be an intimation that it is not Israel after the flesh, but the spiritual Israel, to whom the foregoing promises belong, for as for this Ephraim, this Israel, they *compass God about with lies and deceit*; all their services of him, when they pretended to compass his altar, were feigned and hypocritical; when they surrounded him with their prayers and praises, every one having a petition to present to him, they *lied to him with their mouth and flattered him with their tongue*; their pretensions were so fair, and yet their intentions so foul, that they would, if possible, have imposed upon God himself. Their professions and promises were all a cheat, and yet with these they thought to compass God about, to enclose him as it were, to keep him among them, and prevent his leaving them.

IV. Here is a pleasant commendation of the integrity of the two tribes, which they held fast, and this comes in as an aggravation of the perfidiousness of the ten tribes, and a reason why God had that mercy in store for Judah which he had not for Israel (ch. i. 6, 7), for *Judah yet rules with God and is faithful with the saints, or with the Most Holy*. 1. *Judah rules with God*, that is, he serves God, and the service of God is not only true liberty and freedom, but it is dignity and dominion. *Judah rules*, that is, the princes and governors of Judah *rule with God*; they use their power for him, for his honour, and the support of his interest. 'Those *rule with God* that *rule in the fear of God* (2 Sam. xxiii. 3), and it is their honour to do so, and their praise shall be of God, as Judah's here is. Judah is *Israel—a prince with God*. 2. He is *faithful with the holy God*, keeps close to his worship and *to his saints*—to his priests, to his people; *faithful with the saints*, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose steps they faithfully tread in. They *walk in the way of good*

*men*; and those that do so *ruie with God*, they have a mighty interest in Heaven. Judah yet does thus, which intimates that the time would come when Judah also would revolt and degenerate. Note, When we see how many there are that compass God about *with lies and deceit* it may be a comfort to us to think that God has his remnant that cleave to him with purpose of heart, and are faithful to his saints; and for those who are thus faithful unto death is reserved a crown of life, when hypocrites and all liars shall have their portion without.

## CHAP. XII.

In this chapter we have, 1. A high charge drawn up against both Israel and Judah for their sins, which were the ground of God's controversy with them, ver. 1, 2. Particularly the sin of fraud and injustice, which Ephraim is charged with (ver. 7), and justifies himself in, ver. 8. And the sin of idolatry (ver. 11), by which God is provoked to contend with them, ver. 14. II. The aggravations of the sins they are charged with, taken from the honour God put upon their father Jacob (ver. 3—5), the advancement of them into a people from low and mean beginnings (ver. 12, 13), and the provision he had made them of helps for their souls by the prophets he sent them, ver. 10. III. A call to the unconverted to turn to God, ver. 6. IV. An intimation of mercy that God had in store for them, ver. 9.

**E**PHRAIM feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. 2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. 3 He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: 4 Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; 5 Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial. 6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

In these verses,

I. Ephraim is convicted of folly, in staying himself upon Egypt and Assyria, when he was in straits (v. 1): *Ephraim feeds on wind*, that is, feeds himself with vain hopes of assistance from man, when he is at variance with God; and, when he meets with disappointments, he still pursues the same game, and greedily pants and follows after the east wind, which he cannot catch hold of, nor, if he could, would it be nourishing, nay, it would be noxious. We say of the wind in the east, It is good neither for man nor beast. It was said (ch. viii. 7), He sows the wind; and as he sows so he reaps (He reaps the whirlwind); and as he reaps so he feeds—He feeds on the wind, the east wind. Note, Those that make creatures their confidence



make fools of themselves, and take a great deal of pains to put a cheat upon their own souls and to prepare vexation for themselves: *He daily increaseth lies*, that is, multiplies his correspondences and leagues with his neighbours, which will all prove deceitful to him; nay, they will prove desolation to him. Those very nations that he makes his refuge will prove his ruin. Those that stay themselves upon lies will be still coveting to increase them, that they may build their hopes firmly upon them; as if many lies twisted together would make one truth, or many broken reeds and rotten supports one sound one, which is a great delusion and will prove to them a great desolation; for those that *observe lying vanities* the more they increase them the more disappointments they prepare for themselves and the further they run from *their own mercies*. The men of Ephraim did so when they thought to secure the Assyrians in their interests by a *solemn league*, signed, sealed, and sworn to: *They make a covenant with the Assyrians*, but they will find there is no hold of them; that potent prince will be a slave to his word no longer than he pleases. They thought to secure the Egyptians for their confederates by a rich present of the commodities of their country, not only to purchase their favour, but to show that their friendship was worth having: *Oil is carried into Egypt*. But the Egyptians, when they had got the bribe, dropped the cause, and Ephraim was never the better for them. *Oleum perdidit et operam—The oil and the labour are both lost*. This was *feeding on wind*; this was *increasing lies and desolation*.

II. Judah is contended with too, and Jacob, which includes both Ephraim and Judah (v. 2): *The Lord has also a controversy with Judah*; for though he had awhile ago *ruled with God*, and been *faithful with the saints*, yet now he begins to degenerate. Or though, in keeping close to the house of David and the house of Aaron, and in them to the covenants of royalty and priesthood, they were so far *in the right*, in the former they *ruled with God* and in the latter were *faithful to the saints*, yet upon other accounts God had a *controversy* with them, and would punish them. Note, Men's being in the right in some things, in the main things, will not exempt them from correction, and therefore should not exempt them from reproof, for those things wherein they are in the wrong. There were those of the seven churches of Asia whom Christ approved and commended, and yet he adds, *Nevertheless I have something against thee*. So here; though the seed of Jacob are a people near to God, yet God will punish them according to the evil ways they are found in and the evil doings they are found guilty of; for God sees sin even in his own people, and will reckon with them for it.

III. Both Ephraim and Judah are put in mind of their father Jacob, whose seed they

were and whose name they bore (and it was their honour), of the extraordinary things which he did and which God did for him, that they might be the more ashamed of themselves for degenerating from so illustrious a progenitor and staining the lustre of so great a name, and yet that they might be engaged and encouraged to return to God, the God of their father Jacob, in hopes for his sake to find favour with him. He had called this people Jacob (v. 2), threatening to punish them; but *how shall I give them up?* How shall that dear name be forgotten?

1. Three glorious things concerning Jacob the person Jacob the people are here put in mind of; but by brief hints only, for it is presumed that they knew the story:—(1.) His struggling with Esau in the womb: *There he took his brother by the heel*, v. 3. We have the story Gen. xxv. 26. It was an early act of bravery, and an effort for the best precedence, a pious ambition for that birthright in the covenant which Esau is justly branded as profane for despising. But his degenerate seed, by mingling with the nations, and making leagues with them, profaned that crown, and laid that honour in the dust, which he so gloriously put in for. Then it was that the dominion was given to him: *The elder shall serve the younger*. Then he was owned of God as his beloved *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*. But they had by their sin forfeited both the love of God and dominion over their neighbours. (2.) His wrestling with the angel. "Remember how your father Jacob had *power with God by his own strength*, the strength he had by the gift of God, who *pleaded not against him by his great power, but put strength into him*," Job xxiii. 6. The angel he wrestled with is called *God*, and therefore is supposed to be the *Son of God*, the angel of the covenant. "God was both a combatant with Jacob and an assistant of him, showing, in the latter respect, greater strength than in the former, fighting as it were against him with his left hand and for him with his right, and to that putting greater force." So Dr. Pocock. The providence of God fought against him when he met with one danger after another, in his return homewards; but the grace of God enabled him to go on cheerfully in his way, and, when his faith acted upon the divine promise that was for him prevailed above his fears that arose from the divine providences that were against him, then *by his strength he had power with God*. But it refers especially to his prayer for deliverance from Esau, and for a blessing: *He had power over the angel and prevailed, for he wept and made supplication*. Here was a mixture of the greatest courage and the greatest tenderness, Jacob wrestling like a champion and yet weeping like a child. Note, Prayers and tears are the weapons with which the saints have obtained the most glorious victories. Thus



Jacob commenced *Israel*—a prince with God; his posterity was called *Israel*, but they were unworthy the name, for they had forfeited and lost their communion with God, and their interest in him, by revolting from their duty to him. (3.) His meeting with God at Bethel: God found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us. God found him the first time in Bethel, as he went to Padan-aram (Gen. xxviii. 10), and a second time after his return, Gen. xxxv. 9, &c. It is probable that this refers to both; for in both God spoke to Jacob, and renewed the covenant with him, and the prophet might very well say, *There he spoke with us* who are the seed of Jacob, for both times that God spoke with Jacob at Bethel he spoke with him concerning his seed. Gen. xxviii. 14, *Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth*; and Gen. xxxv. 12, *This land I will give unto thy seed*. Thus God then covenanted with him and his seed after him. Now justly are they upbraided with this; for in that very place which their father Jacob called *Bethel—the house of God*, in remembrance of the communion he there had with God, did they set up one of the calves, and worship it; thus they turned that Bethel into a *Beth-aven—a house of iniquity*. There God spoke with them exceedingly great and precious promises, which they had despised and lost the benefit of.

2. Two inferences are here drawn from these stories concerning Jacob, for instruction to his seed:—

(1.) Here is a use of information. From what passed between God and Jacob we may learn that *Jehovah, the Lord God of hosts, is the God of Israel*; he was the God of Jacob, and this is *his memorial* throughout all the generations of the seed of Jacob (v. 5)—the more shame for those who forgot the memorial of their church, deserted the God of their fathers, and exchanged a *Lord of hosts* for Baalim. Note, Those only are accounted the people of God that keep up a memorial of God, such a memorial of him as he himself has instituted, by which he makes himself known and will have us to remember him. Here are two memorials of his, by which he is distinguished from all others, and is to be acknowledged and adored by us. [1.] The former denotes his *existence of himself*. He is Jehovah, much the same with *I AM*, the same that *was, and is, and is to come*, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Jehovah is *his memorial*, his peculiar name. [2.] The latter denotes his dominion over all: He is the *God of hosts*, that has all the hosts of heaven and earth at his beck and command, and makes what use he pleases of them. Jacob saw *Mahanaim*—God's two hosts, about the time that he wrestled with the angel (Gen. xxxii. 1, 2), and so learned to call God the *God of hosts*, and transmitted it to us as his memorial. God's names, titles, and attributes, are the memorials of him; there is no need for images to be such. And

that which was a revelation of God to one is his memorial to many, to all generations.

(2.) Here is a use of exhortation, v. 6. "Is this so, that Jacob thy father had this communion with the Lord God of hosts, and is this still his memorial?" Then, [1.] Let those that have gone astray from God be converted to him: *Therefore turn thou to thy God*. He that was the God of Jacob is the God of Israel, is *thy God*; from him thou hast unjustly and unkindly revolted; therefore turn thou to him by repentance and faith, turn to him as thine, to love him, obey him, and depend upon him. [2.] Let those that are converted to him walk with him in all holy conversation and godliness: "*Keep mercy and judgment*, mercy in relieving and succouring the poor and distressed, judgment in rendering to all their due; be kind to all; do wrong to none. *Keep piety and judgment*" (so it may be read); "*live righteously and godly in this present world*"; be devout and be honest. Do not only practise these occasionally, but be careful, and constant, and conscientious in the practice of them." [3.] Let those that walk with God be encouraged to live a life of dependence upon him: "*Wait on thy God continually*, with a believing expectation to receive from him all the succours and supplies thou standest in need of." Those that live a life of conformity to God may live a life of confidence and comfort in him, if it be not their own fault. Let our eyes be ever towards the Lord, and let us preserve a holy security and serenity of mind under the protection of the divine power and the influence of the divine favour, looking, without anxiety, for a dubious event, and by faith keeping our spirits sedate and even; this is waiting on God as our God in covenant, and this we must do continually.

7 *He is a merchant*, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. 8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: *in* all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. 9 And I *that am* the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feasts. 10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets. 11 *Is there iniquity in Gilead?* surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields. 12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept *sheep*. 13 And by a



prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved. 14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.

Here are intermixed, in these verses,

I. Reproofs for sin. When God is coming forth to contend with a people, that he may demonstrate his own righteousness, he will demonstrate their unrighteousness. Ephraim was called to turn to his God and *keep judgment* (v. 6); now, to show that he had need of that call, he is charged with turning from his God by idolatry, and breaking the laws of justice and judgment.

1. He is here charged with injustice against the precepts of the second table, v. 7, 8. Here observe,

(1.) What the sin is wherewith he is charged: *He is a merchant*. The margin reads it as a proper name, *He is Canaan*, or a Canaanite, unworthy to be denominated from Jacob and Israel, and worthy to be cast out with a curse from this good land, as the Canaanites were. See Amos ix. 7. But Canaan sometimes signifies a *merchant*, and therefore is most likely to do so here, where Ephraim is charged with deceit in trade. Though God had given his people a land flowing with milk and honey, yet he did not forbid them to enrich themselves by merchandise, and they succeeded the Canaanites in that as well as in their husbandry; they sucked the *abundance of the seas and the treasures hidden in the sand*, Deut. xxxiii. 19. And, if they had been fair merchants, it would have been no reproach at all to them, but an honour and a blessing. But he is such a merchant as the Canaanites were, who were honest only with good looking to, and, if they could, cheated all they dealt with. Ephraim does so; he deceives and thereby oppresses. Note, There is oppression by fraud as well as oppression by force. It is not only princes, lords, and masters, that oppress their subjects, tenants, and servants, but merchants and traders are often guilty of oppressing those they deal with, when they impose upon their ignorance, or take advantage of their necessity, to make hard bargains with them, or are rigorous and severe in exacting their debts. Ephraim cheated, [1.] With a great deal of art and cunning: *The balances of deceit are in his hand*. He uses balances, and delivers his goods by weight and measure, as if he would be very exact, but they are balances of deceit, false weights and false measures, and thus, under colour of doing right, he does the greatest wrong. Note, God has his eye upon merchants and traders, when they are weighing their goods and paying their money, whether they do honestly or deceitfully. He observes what

balances they have in their hand, and how they hold them; and, though those they deal with may not be aware of that sleight of hand with which they make them balances of deceit, God sees it, and knows it. Trades by the wit of man are made *mysteries*, but it is a pity that by the sin of man they should ever be made *mysteries of iniquity*. [2.] With a great deal of pleasure and pride: *He loves to oppress*. To oppress is bad enough, but to love to do so is much worse. His conscience does not check and reprove him for it, as it ought to do; if it did, though he committed the sin, he could not delight in it; but his corruptions are so strong, and have so triumphed over his convictions, that he not only loves the gain of oppression, but he loves to oppress, sins for sinning-sake, and takes a pleasure in out-witting and over-reaching those that suspect him not.

(2.) How he justifies himself in this sin, v. 8. Wicked men will have something to say for themselves now when they are told of their faults, some frivolous turn-off or other wherewith to evade the convictions of the word. Ephraim stands indicted for a common cheat. Now see what he pleads to the indictment. He does not deny the charge, nor plead, Not guilty, yet does not make a penitent confession of it and ask pardon, but insists upon his own justification. Suppose it were so that he did use balances of deceit, yet, [1.] He pleads that he had got a good estate. Let the prophet say what he pleased of his deceit, of the sin of it and the curse of God that attended it, he could not be convinced there was any harm or danger in it, for this he was sure of that he had thriven in it: "*Yet I have become rich, I have found me out substance*. Whatever you make of it, I have made a good hand of it." Note, Carnal hearts are often confirmed in a good opinion of their evil ways by their worldly prosperity and success in those ways. But it is a great mistake. Every word in what Ephraim says here proclaims his folly. *First*, It is folly to call the riches of this world substance, for they are things that are not, Prov. xxiii. 5. *Secondly*, It is folly to think that we have them of ourselves, to say (as some read it), *I have made myself rich*; what substance I have is owing purely to my ingenuity and industry — *I have found it*; my might and the power of my hand have gotten me this wealth. *Thirdly*, It is folly to think that what we have is for ourselves. *I have found me out substance*, as if we had it for our own proper use and behoof, whereas we hold it in trust, only as stewards. *Fourthly*, It is folly to think that riches are things to be gloried in, and to say with exultation, *I have become rich*. Riches are not the honours of the soul, are not peculiar to the best men, nor sure to us; and therefore let not the rich man glory in his riches, Jam. i. 9, 10. *Fifthly*, It is folly to think that growing rich in a sinful way

makes us innocent, or will make us safe, or may make us easy, in that way; for the prosperity of fools deceives and destroys them. See Isa. xlvii. 10; Prov. i. 32. [2.] He pleads that he had kept a good reputation. It is common for sinners, when they are justly reprov'd by their ministers, to appeal to their neighbours, and because they know no ill of them, or will say none, or think well of what the prophets charge them with as bad, fly in the face of their reprovers: *In all my labours* (says Ephraim) *they shall find no iniquity in me that were sin.* Note, Carnal hearts are apt to build a good opinion of themselves upon the fair character they have among their neighbours. Ephraim was very secure; for, *First*, All his neighbours knew him to be diligent in his business; they had an eye upon *all his labours*, and commended him for them. *Men will praise thee when thou doest well for thyself.* *Secondly*, None of them knew him to be deceitful in his business. He acted with so much policy that nobody could say to the contrary but that he acted with integrity. For either, 1. He concealed the fraud, so that none discovered it: "Whatever iniquity there is, *they shall find none*;" as if no iniquity were displeasing to God, and damning to the soul; but that which is open and scandalous before men. What will it avail us that men shall find no iniquity in us, when God finds a great deal, and will bring every secret work, even secret frauds, into judgment? Or, 2. He excused the fraud, so that none condemned it: "*They shall find no iniquity in me that were sin*," nothing very bad, nothing but what is very excusable, only some venial sins, sins not worth speaking of," which they think God will make nothing of because they do not. It is a fashionable iniquity; it is customary; it is what every body does; it is pleasant; it is gainful; and this, they think, is no iniquity that is sin; nobody will think the worse of them for it. But God sees not as man sees; he judges not as man judges.

2. He is here charged with idolatry, against the precepts of the first table, with that iniquity which is in a special manner vanity, the making and worshipping of images, which are vanities (v. 11): *Surely they are vanity*; they do not profit, but deceive. Now the prophet mentions two places notorious for idolatry:—(1.) Gilead on the other side Jordan, which had been branded for it before (ch. vi. 8): *Is there iniquity in Gilead?* It is a thing to be wondered at; it is a thing to be sadly lamented. What! iniquity in Gilead? idolatry there? Gilead was a fruitful pleasant country (pleasant to a proverb, Jer. xxii. 6), and does it so ill requite the Lord? It was a frontier-country, and lay much exposed to the insults of enemies, and therefore stood in special need of the divine protection; what! and yet by iniquity throw itself out of that protection? *Is there ini-*

*quity in Gilead?* Yea, (2.) And in Gilgal too; there they *sacrifice bullocks* (ch. ix. 15), and there *their altars* which they have set up, either to strange gods in opposition to God himself or to the God of Israel in opposition to his own appointed altar, are as thick as *heaps of manure in the furrows of the field* that is to be sown, ch. viii. 11. *Is there iniquity in Gilead only?* so some. Is it only in those remote parts of the nation that people are so superstitious, where they border upon other nations? No; they are as bad at Gilgal. In Gilead God protected Jacob their father (of whom he had been speaking) from the rage of Laban; and will you there commit iniquity?

II. Here are threatenings of wrath for sin. Some make that to be so (v. 9), *I will make thee to dwell in tabernacles as in the days of the appointed time*, that is, I will bring thee into such a condition as the Israelites were in when they dwelt in tents and wandered for forty years; that was the *time appointed in the wilderness*. Ephraim forgot that God brought him out of Egypt and brought him up to be what he was, and was proud of his wealth, and took sinful courses to increase it; and therefore God threatens to bring him to a tabernacle-state again, to a poor, mean, desolate, unsettled condition. Note, It is just with God, when men have by their sins turned their tents into houses, by his judgments to turn their houses into tents again. However, that is certainly a threatening (v. 14), *Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly*. See how men are deceived in their opinion of themselves, and how they will one day be undeceived. Ephraim thought that there was no iniquity in him that deserved to be called sin (v. 8); but God told him that there was that in him which was sin, and would be found so if he did not repent and reform; for, 1. It was extremely offensive to his God: *Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly* with his iniquities, which were so distasteful to God, and to him too would be *bitterness in the latter end*. He was so wilful in sinning against his knowledge and convictions that any one might see, and say, that he designed no other than to provoke God in the highest degree. 2. It would certainly be destructive to himself; that cannot be otherwise which provokes God against him, and kindles the fire of his wrath. Therefore, (1.) He shall take away his forfeited life: *He shall leave his blood upon him*, that is, he shall not hold him guiltless, but bring upon him that death which is the wages of sin. *His blood shall be upon his own head* (2 Sam. i. 16), for his own iniquity has testified against him and he alone shall bear it. Note, When sinners perish their blood is left upon them. (2.) He shall take away his forfeited honour: *His reproach shall his Lord return upon him*. God is *his Lord*; he had by idolatry and other sins reproached the Lord, and done



dishonour to him, and to his name and family, and had given occasion to others to reproach him; and now God will return the reproach upon him, according to the word he has spoken, that *those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed*. Note, Shameful sins shall have shameful punishments. If Ephraim put contempt on his God, he shall be so reduced that all his neighbours shall look with contempt upon him.

III. Here are memorials of former mercy, which come in to convict them of base ingratitude in revolting from God. Let them blush to remember,

1. That God had raised them from meanness. When Ephraim had become rich, and was proud of that, he forgot that which God (that he might not forget it) obliged them every year to acknowledge (Deut. xxvi. 5), *A Syrian ready to perish was my father*. But God here puts them in mind of it, v. 12. Let them remember, not only the honours of their father Jacob, what a *mighty prince* he was with God, v. 3 (an honour which they had no share in while they were in rebellion against God), but what a poor servant he was to Laban, which was sufficient to mortify those that were puffed up with the estates they had raised. *Jacob fled into Syria* from a malicious brother, and there served a covetous uncle *for a wife*, and *for a wife he kept sheep*, because he had no estate to endow a wife with. Jacob was poor, and low, and a fugitive; therefore his posterity ought not to be proud. He was a plain man, dwelling in tents, and keeping sheep; therefore *balances of deceit* ill became them. He *served for a wife* that was not a Canaanitess, as Esau's wives were; therefore it was a shame for them to degenerate into Canaanites, and mingle with the nations. God wonderfully preserved him in his flight and preserved him in his service, so that he multiplied exceedingly, and from that root in a dry ground sprang an illustrious nation, that bore his name, which magnifies the goodness of God both to him and them and leaves them under the stain of base ingratitude to that God who was their founder and benefactor.

2. That God had rescued them from misery, had raised them to what they were, not only out of poverty, but out of slavery (v. 13), which laid them under much stronger obligations to serve him and under a yet deeper guilt in serving other gods. (1.) God *brought Israel out of Egypt* on purpose that they might serve him, and by redeeming them out of bondage acquired a special title to them and to their service. (2.) He preserved them, as sheep are kept by the shepherd's care. He preserved them from Pharaoh's rage at the sea, even at the Red Sea, protected them from all the perils of the wilderness, and provided for them. (3.) He did this *by a prophet*, Moses, who, though he is called *king in Jeshurun* (Deut. xxxiii. 5), yet

did what he did for Israel *as a prophet*, by direction from God and by the power of his word. The ensign of his authority was not a royal sceptre, but the *rod of God*; with that he summoned both Egypt's plagues and Israel's blessings. Moses, as a prophet, was a type of Christ (Acts iii. 22), and it is by Christ as a prophet that we are brought out of the Egypt of sin and Satan by the power of his truth. Now this shows how very unworthy and ungrateful this people were, [1.] In rejecting their God, who had brought them out of Egypt, which, in the preface to the commandments, is particularly mentioned as a reason for the first, why they should have no other gods before him. [2.] In despising and persecuting his prophets, whom they should have loved and valued, and have studied to answer God's end in sending them, for the sake of that prophet by whom God had brought them out of Egypt and preserved them in the wilderness. Note, The benefit we have had by the word of God greatly aggravates our sin and folly if we put any slight upon the word of God.

3. That God had taken care of their education as they grew up. This instance of God's goodness we have, v. 10. As by a prophet he delivered them, so *by prophets* he still continued to speak to them. Man, who is formed out of the earth, is fed out of the earth; so that nation, that was formed by prophecy, by prophecy was fed and taught; *beginning at Moses*, and so going on to *all the prophets* through the several ages of that church, we find that divine revelation was all along their tuition. (1.) They had prophets raised up among themselves (Amos ii. 11), a succession of them, were scarcely ever without a Spirit of prophecy among them more or less, from Moses to Malachi. (2.) These prophets were *seers*; they had *visions*, and *dreams*, in which God discovered his mind to them immediately, with a full assurance that it was his mind, Num. xii. 6. (3.) These visions were multiplied; God spoke not only *once, yea, twice*, but many a time; if one vision was not regarded, he sent another. The prophets had variety of visions, and frequent repetitions of the same. (4.) God *spoke* to them *by the prophets*. What the prophets *received from the Lord* they plainly and faithfully delivered to them. The people at Mount Sinai begged that God would speak to them by men like themselves, and he did so. (5.) In speaking to them by the prophets he *used similitudes*, to make the messages he sent by them intelligible, more affecting, and more likely to be remembered. The visions they saw were often similitudes, and their discourses were embellished with very apt comparisons. And, as God by his prophets, so by his Son, he *used similitudes*, for he *opened his mouth in parables*. Note, God keeps an account, whether we do or no, of the sermons we hear; and those that have long enjoyed the means of grace in purity,



plenty, and power, that have been frequently, faithfully, and familiarly, told the mind of God, will have a great deal to answer for another day if they persist in a course of iniquity.

IV. Here are intimations of further mercy, and this remembered too in the midst of sin and wrath (as some understand v. 9): "*I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt*, who then and there took thee to be my people, and have approved myself thy God ever since, in a constant series of merciful providences, have yet a kindness for thee, bad as thou art; and I will *make thee to dwell in tabernacles*, not as in the wilderness, but *as in the days of the solemn feast*," the feast of tabernacles, which was celebrated with great joy, Lev. xxiii. 40. 1. They shall be made to see, by the grace of God, that though they are rich, and have found out substance, yet they are but in a tabernacle-state, and have in their worldly wealth *no continuing city*. 2. They shall yet have cause to rejoice in God, and have opportunity to do it in public ordinances. The feast of tabernacles was the first solemn feast the Jews kept after their return out of Babylon, Ezra iii. 4. 3. This, as other promises, was to have its full accomplishment in the grace of the gospel, which provides tabernacles for believers in their way to heaven, and furnishes them with matter of joy, holy joy, joy in God, such as was in the feast of tabernacles, Zech. xiv. 18, 19.

## CHAP. XIII.

The same strings, though generally unsuelling ones, are harped upon in this chapter that were in those before. People care not to be told either of their sin or of their danger by sin; and yet it is necessary, and for their good, that they should be told of both, nor can they better hear of either than from the word of God and from their faithful ministers, while the sin may be repented of and the danger prevented. Here, 1. The people of Israel are reproved and threatened for their idolatry, ver. 1-4. II. They are reproved and threatened for their wantonness, pride, and luxury, and other abuses of their wealth and prosperity, ver. 5-8. III. The ruin that is coming upon them for these and all their other sins is foretold as very terrible, ver. 12, 13, 15, 16. IV. Those among them that yet retain a respect for their God are here encouraged to hope that he will yet appear for their relief, though their kings and princes, and all their other supports and succours, fail them, ver. 8-11, 14.

**W**HEN Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died. 2 And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves. 3 Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. 4 Yet I *am* the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt

know no god but me: for *there is no saviour beside me*.

Idolatry was the sin that did most easily beset the Jewish nation till after the captivity; the ten tribes from the first were guilty of it, but especially after the days of Ahab; and this is the sin which, in these verses, they are charged with. Observe,

I. The provision that God made to prevent their falling into idolatry. 'This we have, v. 4. God did what was fit to be done to keep them close to himself; what could have been done more? 1. He made known himself to them as *the Lord their God*, and took them to be his people in a peculiar manner. Both by his word and by his works all along from the land of Egypt he declared, *I am the Lord thy God*; he told them so from heaven at Mount Sinai, that he was *the Lord and their God*, who brought them out of the land of Egypt. This he continued both to declare and to prove to them by his prophets and by his providences. 2. He gave them a law forbidding them to worship any other: "*Thou shalt know no God but me*; not only shalt not own and worship any other, but shalt not acquaint thyself with any other, nor make the rites and usages of the Gentiles familiar to thee." Note, It is a happy ignorance not to know that which we ought not to meddle with. We find those commended who *have not known the depths of Satan*. 3. He gave them a good reason for it: *There is no saviour besides me*. Whatever we take for our God we expect to have for our saviour, to make us happy here and hereafter; as, where we have protection, we owe allegiance, so where we have salvation, and hope for it, we owe adoration.

II. The honour that Ephraim had, while he kept himself clear from idolatry (v. 1): *While Ephraim spoke trembling*, or *with trembling* (that is, as Dr. Pocock understands it, while he behaved himself towards God as his father Jacob did, with *weeping and supplications*, and spoke not proudly and insolently against God and his prophets, while he kept up a holy fear of God, and worshipped him in that fear), so long he *exalted himself in Israel*, that is, he was very considerable among the tribes and made a figure. Jeroboam, who was of that tribe, exalted himself and his family. *When he spoke there was trembling*, that is, all about him stood in awe of him; so some understand it. Note, *Those that humble themselves*, especially that humble themselves before God, *shall be exalted*. When people speak with modesty and jealousy of themselves, with a diffidence of their own judgment and a deference to others, they exalt themselves, they gain a reputation. But as for Ephraim he soon lost himself. *When he offended in Baal he died*, that is, he lost his reputation, his honour soon dwindled and sunk, and was laid in the dust. Baal is here put for all idolatry; when Ephraim



forsook God, and took to worship images, the state received its death's wound and was never good for anything afterwards. Note, Deserting God is the death of any person or persons.

III. The lamentable growth of idolatry among them (v. 2): *Now they sin more and more.* When once he began to offend in *Baal* the ice was broken, and he grew worse and worse, coveted more idols, doted more upon those he had, and grew more ridiculous in the worship of them. Note, The way of idolatry, as of other sins, is down-hill, and men cannot easily stop themselves. It is the sad case of all those who have forsaken God that they sin yet more and more. Let us trace them in their apostasy. 1. They made themselves *molten images*, proud to have gods that they could cast into what mould they pleased; probably these were the calves in miniature like the silver shrines for Diana; the zealots for the calf-worship carried about with them, it may be, images of the gods they worshipped, made on purpose for themselves. 2. They made them of *their silver*, and then doubted not of their property in them, when they purchased them with their own money or made them of their own plate melted down for that purpose. See what cost they put themselves to in the service of their idols, which they honoured with the best they had, and therefore made their molten images of silver. 3. They made them according to their own understanding, according to their own fancy. They consulted with themselves what shape they should make their idol in, and made it accordingly, *a god according to the best of their judgment.* Or according to their own likeness, in the form of a man. And, when they made their idols men like themselves in shape, they made themselves stocks and stones like them in reality; for those that make them are like unto them, and so is every one that trusts in them. 4. It was all the work of the craftsmen. Their images did not pretend, like that of Diana, to have come down from Jupiter (Acts xix. 35); no, perhaps the workmen stamped their names upon them, such an idol was such a man's work. See ch. viii. 6; Isa. xlv. 9, &c. 5. Though they were thus the work of their hands, yet they were the beloved of their souls; for they say of them, *Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.* Either the priests called upon the people thus to pay their homage, or the people, who were not allowed to come so near themselves, called upon the men that sacrificed, the priests that attended for them, to *kiss the calves* in their name and stead, because they could not reach to do it, so very fond were they of paying their utmost respects to such an idol as they were taught to have a veneration for. Though they were calves, yet, if they were gods, the worshippers, by themselves or their proxies, thus made their honours to them. They *kissed*

the calves, in token of the adoration of them, affection for them, and allegiance to them, as theirs. Thus we are directed to *kiss the Son*, to take him for our Lord and our God.

IV. Threatenings of wrath for their idolatry. The Lord, whose name is *Jealous*, is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another; and therefore all those that worship images shall be *confounded*, especially if Ephraim do it, Ps. xcvi. 7. Because they are so fond of kissing their calves, therefore God will give them sensible convictions of their folly, v. 3. They promise themselves a great deal of safety and satisfaction in the worship of their idols, and that their prosperity will thereby be established; but God tells them that they shall be disappointed, and *driven away in their wickedness.* This is illustrated by four similitudes:—They shall be, 1. As the *morning cloud*, which promises showers of rain to the parched ground. 2. As the *early dew*, which seems to be an earnest of such showers. But both *pass away*, and the day proves as dry and hot as ever; so fleet and transitory their profession of piety was (ch. vi. 4), and so had they disappointed God's expectation from them, and therefore it is just that so their prosperity should be, and so their expectations from their idols should be disappointed, and so will all theirs be that make an idol of this world. 3. They are *as the chaff*, light and worthless; and they shall be driven *as the chaff is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor*, Ps. i. 4; xxxv. 5; Job xxi. 18. Nay, 4. They are *as the smoke*, noisome and offensive (see Isa. lxv. 5), and they shall be driven away *as the smoke out of the chimneys*, that is soon dissipated and disappears, Ps. lxxviii. 2. Note, No solid lasting comfort is to be expected any where but in God.

5 I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. 6 According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. 7 Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: 8 I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.

We may observe here, 1. The plentiful provision God had made for Israel and the seasonable supplies he had blessed them with (v. 5): "*I did know thee in the wilderness*, took cognizance of thy case and made provision for thee, even in a land of great drought, when thou wast in extreme distress, and when no relief was to be had in an ordinary way." See a description of this wilderness, Deut. viii. 15, Jer. ii. 6, and say,

The God that knew them, and owned them, and fed them there, was a *friend indeed*, for he was a *friend at need* and an all-sufficient friend, that could victual so vast an army when all ordinary ways of provision were cut off, and where, if miracles had not been their daily bread, they must all have perished. Note, Help at an exigency lays under peculiar obligations and must never be forgotten. 2. Their unworthy ungrateful abuse of God's favour to them. God not only took care of them in the wilderness, but put them in possession of Canaan, a good land, a large and fat pasture. And (v. 6) *according to their pasture so were they filled*. God gave them both plenty and dainties, and they did not spare it, but, having been long confined to manna, when they came into Canaan they fed themselves *to the full*. And this was no hopeful presage; it would have looked better, and promised better, if they had been more modest and moderate in the use of their plenty, and had learned to deny themselves; but what was the effect of it? *They were filled, and their heart was exalted*. Their luxury and sensuality made them proud, insolent, and secure. The best comment upon this is that of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 13—15. But *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked*. When the body was stuffed up with plenty the soul was puffed up with pride. Then they began to think their religion a thing below them, and they could not persuade themselves to stoop to the services of it. *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God*. When they were poor and lame in the wilderness they thought it was necessary for them to keep in with God; but when they were replenished and established in Canaan they began to think they had no further need of him: *Their heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me*. Note, Worldly prosperity, when it feeds men's pride, makes them forgetful of God; for they remember him only when they want him. When Israel was filled, what more could the Almighty do for them? And therefore they said to him, *Depart from us*, Job xxii. 17. It is said that those favours which ought to make us mindful of God, and studious what we shall render to him, should make us unmindful of him, and regardless what we do against him. We ought to know that we live upon God when we live upon common providence, though we do not, as Israel in the wilderness, live upon miracles. 3. God's just resentment of their base ingratitude, v. 7, 8. The judgments threatened (v. 3) intimated the departure of all good from them. The threatenings here go further, and intimate the breaking in of all evils upon them; for God, who had so much befriended them, now turns to be their enemy and fights against them, which is expressed here very terribly: *I will be unto them as a lion and as a leopard*. The lion is strong, and there is no resisting him. The

leopard is here taken notice of to be crafty and vigilant: *As a leopard by the way will I observe them*. As that beast of prey lies in wait by the road-side to catch travellers, and devour them, so will God by his judgments watch over them to do them hurt, as he had watched over them to do them good, Jer. xlv. 27. No opportunity shall be let slip that may accelerate or aggravate their ruin (Jer. v. 6): *A leopard shall watch over their cities*. A lynx, or spotted beast (and such the leopard is), is noted for quicksightedness above any creature (*lynx visu—the eyes of a lynx*), and so it intimates that not only the power, but the wisdom of God is engaged against those whom he has a controversy with. Some read it (and the original will bear it), *I will be as a leopard in the way of Assyria*. The judgments of God shall surprise them just when they are going to the Assyrians to seek for protection and help from them. It is added, *I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved*, and thereby exasperated and made more cruel (2 Sam. xvii. 8, Prov. xxviii. 15), which intimates how highly God was provoked, and he would make them feel it: *He will rend the caul of their heart*. The lion is observed to aim at the heart of the beasts he preys upon, and thus will God devour them like a lion. He will send such judgments upon them as shall prey upon their spirits and consume their vitals. Their heart was exalted (v. 6), but God will take an effectual course to bring it down: *The wild beast shall tear them*; not only God will be as a lion and leopard to them, but the metaphor shall be fulfilled in the letter, for noisome beasts are one of the four sore judgments with which God will destroy a provoking people, Ezek. xiv. 15.

Now all this teaches us, 1. That abused goodness turns into the greater severity. Those who despise God and affront him, when he is to them as a careful tender shepherd, shall find he will be even to his own flock as the beasts of prey are. Those whom God has in vain endured with much long-suffering, and invited with much affection, in them he will show his wrath and make them vessels of it, Rom. ix. 22. *Patientia læsa fit furor—Despised patience will turn into fury*. 2. That the judgments of God, when they come with commission against impenitent sinners, will be irresistible and very terrible. They will rend the caul of the heart, will fill the soul with confusion, and tear that in pieces; and we are as unable to grapple with them as a lamb is to make his part good against a roaring lion, for who knows the power of God's anger? Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, let us be persuaded to make peace with him; for are we stronger than he?

9 O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. 10 I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy



cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? 11 I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath. 12 The iniquity of Ephraim *is* bound up; his sin *is* hid. 13 The sorrows of a travelling woman shall come upon him: he *is* an unwise son; for he should not stay long in *the place* of the breaking forth of children. 14 I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. 15 Though he be fruitful among *his* brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels. 16 Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.

The first of these verses is the summary, or contents, of all the rest (v. 9), where we have, 1. All the blame of Israel's ruin laid upon themselves: *O Israel! thy perdition is thence*; it is of and from thyself; or, "*It has destroyed thee, O Israel!*" that is, all that sin and folly of thine which thou art before charged with. As *thy own wickedness* has many a time corrected thee, so that has now at length destroyed thee." Note, Wilful sinners are self-destroyers. Obstinate impenitence is the grossest self-murder. Those that are *destroyed of the destroyer* have their blood upon their own head; they have *destroyed themselves*. 2. All the glory of Israel's relief ascribed to God: *But in me is thy help*. That is, (1.) It might have been: "I would have helped thee and healed thee, but thou wouldst not be healed and helped, but wast resolutely set upon thy own destruction." This will aggravate the condemnation of sinners, not only that they did that which tended to their own ruin, but that they opposed the offers God made them and the methods he took with them to prevent it: *I would have gathered them, and they would not*. They might have been easily and effectually helped, but they put the help away from them. Nay, (2.) It may be: "Thy case is bad, but it is not desperate. *Thou hast destroyed thyself*; but come to me, and I will help thee." This is a plank thrown

out after shipwreck, and greatly magnifies not only the power of God, that he can help when things are at the worst, can help those that cannot help themselves, but the riches of his grace, that he will help those that have destroyed themselves and therefore might justly be left to perish, that he will help those that have long refused his help. Dr. Pocock gives a different reading and sense of this verse: "*O Israel! this has destroyed thee, that in me is thy help*. Presuming upon God and his favour has emboldened thee in those wicked ways which have been thy ruin."

Now, in the rest of these verses, we may see,

1. How Israel destroyed themselves. It is said (v. 16), *They rebelled against God*, revolted from their allegiance to him, entered into a confederacy with his enemies, and took up arms against him; and this was the thing that ruined them, for never any hardened themselves against God and prospered. Note, Those that rebel against their God destroy themselves, for they make him their enemy for whom they are an unequal match.

1. They treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and so they destroy themselves. They are doing that, every day, which will be remembered against them another day (v. 12): *The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, and his sin is hid*; God took notice of it, kept it upon record, and will produce it against him and reckon with him for it afterwards. Their former sins contributed to their present destruction; for they were *laid up in store with God*, Deut. xxxii. 34, 35; Job xiv. 17. It is laid up in safety, and will not be forgotten, nor the evidence against him lost; but it is laid up in secret; it is hid; the sinner himself is not aware of it. It is bound up in God's omniscience, in the sinner's own conscience. Note, The sin of sinners is not forgotten till it is pardoned, but an exact account is kept of it, which will be opened in proper time.

2. They make no haste to repent and help themselves when they are under divine rebukes; they are their own ruin because they will not do what they should do towards their own salvation, v. 13. (1.) They are brought into trouble and distress by sin: *The sorrows of a travelling woman shall come upon him*. They shall smart for sin, and so be made sensible of it; they shall be thrown into pangs and agonies by it, very sharp and severe, and yet, like the pains of a woman in labour, hopeful and promising, and in order to deliverance; and by these, though God corrects them, yet he designs their good. They are chastened, that they may not be destroyed. But, (2.) They are not by these forwarded as they ought to be towards repentance and reformation, which would cause their sorrows to issue in true joy: *He is an unwise son, for he should not stay long*, as he does, *in the place of the breaking forth of children*, but,



being brought to the birth, should struggle to get forth, lest he be stifled and still-born at last. Were the child which the mother is in travail of capable of understanding its own case, we should reckon it an unwise child that would choose to stay long in the birth; for the captive exile hasteth to be loosed, lest he die in the pit, Isa. li. 14. Note, Those may justly be reckoned their own destroyers who defer and put off their repentance, by which alone they might help themselves. Those are in danger of miscarrying in conversion who delay it, and will not put forth themselves to speed the work and bring it to an issue.

3. Therefore they are destroyed because they have done that which will be their certain ruin and neglected that which would have been their only relief. Here is a sad description of the desolation they are doomed to, v. 15, 16. It is here taken for granted that Ephraim is fruitful among his children; his name signifies fruitfulness. He is fruitful in respect of the plentiful products of his country and the great numbers of its inhabitants; it was both a rich and a populous tribe, as was foretold concerning it; but sin turns this fruitful tribe into barrenness. Joseph was a fruitful bough, but for sin it was blasted. The instrument is an east wind, representing a foreign enemy that should invade it. It is called the wind of the Lord, not only because it shall be a very great and strong wind, but because it shall be sent by divine direction; it shall come from the Lord, and do whatever he appoints; and see what effect it shall have upon that flourishing tribe, what desolations war shall make. (1.) Was it a rich tribe? The foreign enemy shall make it poor enough. This wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, a freezing blasting wind, and shall dry up the springs and fountains with which this tree is watered, shall exhaust the sources of its wealth. The invader shall waste the country and so impoverish the husbandman, shall intercept trade and commerce and so impoverish the merchant; and let not the great men, whose wealth lies in their rich furniture, think that they shall be exempted from the judgment, for he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels. See the folly of those that lay up their treasure on earth, that lay it up in pleasant vessels (vessels of desire, so the word is), on which they set their affections, and in which they place their comfort and satisfaction. This is treasure that may be spoiled and that they may be spoiled of; it is what either moth or rust may corrupt, or what thieves and soldiers may steal and carry away. But wise and happy are those who have laid up their treasure in heaven, and in the pleasant things of that world, which cannot be spoiled, which they cannot be stripped of; ever happy are they, and therefore truly wise. (2.) Was it a populous tribe, and numerous? The enemy shall depopulate it and make its

men few: *Samaria shall become desolate, without inhabitants.* [1.] Those shall be cut off who are the guard and joy of the present generation; the men who bear arms shall bear them to no purpose, for they shall fall by the sword, so that there shall be none to make head against the fury of the conqueror nor to take care of the concerns either of the public or of private families. [2.] Those shall be cut off who are the seed and hope of the next generation, who should rise up in the places of those who fell by the sword; the whole nation must be rooted out, and therefore the infants shall be dashed to pieces, in the most cruel and barbarous manner, and, which is if possible yet more inhuman, the women with child shall be ripped up. Thus shall the glory of Samaria flee away from the birth, and from the womb, ch. ix. 11; x. 14. See instances of this cruelty, 2 Kings viii. 12; xv. 16; Amos i. 13.

II. Let us now see how God was the help of this self-destroying people, how he was their only help (v. 10): *I will be thy King, to rule and save thee.* Though they had refused to be his subjects and had rebelled against him, yet he would still be their King and would not abandon them. The business and care of a good king is to keep his people, not only from being ruined by foreign enemies, but from ruining themselves and one another. Thus will God yet be Israel's King, as he was their King of old. Note, Our case would be sad indeed if God were not better to us than we are to ourselves.

1. God will be their King when they have no other king; he will protect and save them when those are cut off and gone who should have been their protectors and saviours: *I will be he* (so v. 10 may be read), he that shall help thee. "Where is the king that may save thee in all thy cities, that may go in and out before thee, and fight thy battles, when thy cities are invaded by a foreign power, and suppress the more dangerous quarrels of thy citizens among themselves? Where are thy judges, who by administering public justice should preserve the public peace? For it is righteousness and peace that kiss each other. Where are thy judges that thou hadst such a desire of and such a dependence upon, of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?" This refers, (1.) To the foolish wicked desire which the whole nation had of a kingly government, being weary of the theocracy, or divine government, which they had been under during the time of the Judges, because it looked too mean for them. They rejected Samuel, and in him the Lord, when they said, Give us a king like the nations, whereas the Lord was their King. (2.) To the desire which the ten tribes had of a kingly government different from that of the house of David, because they thought that was too absolute and bore too hard upon them, and they hoped to better themselves by setting



up Jeroboam. Both these are instances, [1.] Of men's improvidence for themselves. When they are uneasy with their present lot they are fond of novelty, and think to better themselves by a change; but they are commonly disappointed, and do not find that advantage in the alteration which they promised themselves. [2.] Of men's impiety towards God, in thinking to refine upon his appointments and amend them. God gave Israel judges and prophets for their guidance; but they were weary of them, and cried, *Give us a king and princes.* God gave them the house of David, established it by a covenant of royalty; but they were soon weary of that too, and cried, *We have no part in David.* Those destroy themselves who are not pleased with what God does for them, but think they can do better for themselves. Well, in both these requests, Providence humoured them, gave them Saul first, and afterwards Jeroboam. And what the better were they for them? Saul was *given in anger* (given in *thunder*, 1 Sam. xii. 18, 19) and soon after was *taken away in wrath*, upon Mount Gilboa. The kingly government of the ten tribes was given in anger, not only against Solomon for his defection, but against the ten tribes that desired it, for their discontent and disaffection to the house of David; and God was now about to take that away in wrath by the power of the king of Assyria. And then, *where is thy king?* He is gone, and thou shalt abide many days *without a king, and without a prince* (ch. iii. 4), shalt have none to save thee, none to rule thee. Note, *First*, God often gives in anger what we sinfully and inordinately desire, gives it with a curse, and with it gives us up to our own hearts' lusts. Thus he gave Israel quails. *Secondly*, What we inordinately desire we are commonly disappointed in, and it cannot save us, as we expected it should. *Thirdly*, What God gives in anger he takes away in wrath; what he gives because we did not desire it well he takes away because we did not use it well. It is the happiness of the saints that, whether God gives or takes, it is all in love, and furnishes them with matter for praise. *To the pure all things are pure.* It is the misery of the wicked that, whether God gives or takes, it is all in wrath; to them nothing is pure, nothing is comfortable.

2. God will do that for them which no other king could do if they had one (v. 14): *I will ransom them from the power of the grave.* Though Israel, according to the flesh, be abandoned to destruction, God has mercy in store for his spiritual Israel, in whom all the promises were to have their accomplishment, and this among the rest, for to them the apostle applies it (1 Cor. xv. 55), and particularly to the blessed resurrection of believers at the great day, yet not excluding their spiritual resurrection from the death of sin to a holy, heavenly,

spiritual, and divine life. It is promised, (1.) That the captives shall be delivered, *shall be ransomed, from the power of the grave.* Their deliverance shall be by ransom; and we know who it was that paid their ransom, and what the ransom was, for it was the Son of man that *gave his life a ransom for many*, Matt. xx. 28. It is he that thus redeemed them. Those who, upon their repenting and believing, are, for the sake of Christ's righteousness, acquitted from the guilt of sin and saved from death and hell, which are the *wages of sin*, are those *ransomed of the Lord* that shall, in the great day, be brought out of the grave in triumph, and it shall be as impossible for the bands of death to hold them as it was to hold their Master. (2.) That the conqueror shall be destroyed: *O death! I will be thy plagues.* Jesus Christ was the plague and destruction of death and the grave when by death he *destroyed him that had the power of death*, and when in his own resurrection he triumphed over the grave. But the complete destruction of them will be in the resurrection of believers at the great day, when death shall for ever be swallowed up in victory, and it is the last enemy that shall be destroyed. But the word which we translate *I will* may as well be rendered *Ubi nunc—Where now* are thy plagues? And so the apostle took it: "*O death! where is thy plague, or sting, with which thou hast so long pestered the world? O grave! where is thy victory, or thy destruction, wherewith thou hast destroyed mankind?*" Christ has abolished death, has broken the power of it and altered the property of it, and so enabled us to triumph over it. This promise he has made, and it shall be made good to all that are his; for *repentance shall be hidden from his eyes*; he will never recall this sentence passed on death and the grave, for he is not a man that he should repent. Thanks be to God therefore who gives us the victory.

#### CHAP. XIV.

The strain of this chapter differs from that of the foregoing chapters.

Those were generally made up of reproofs for sin and threatenings of wrath; but this is made up of exhortations to repentance and promises of mercy, and with these the prophet closes; for all the foregoing convictions and terrors he had spoken were designed to prepare and make way for these. He wounds that he may heal. The Spirit convinces that he may comfort. This chapter is a lesson for penitents; and some such there were in Israel at this day, bad as things were. We have here, I. Directions in repenting, what to do and what to say, ver. 1-3. II. Encouragements to repent, taken from God's readiness to receive returning sinners (ver. 4, 6) and the comforts he has treasured up for them, ver. 5-7. III. A solemn recommendation of these things to our serious thoughts, ver. 9.

**O** ISRAEL, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. 2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. 3 Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any

more to the work of our hands, *Ye are our gods*: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

Here we have,

I. A kind invitation given to sinners to repent, v. 1. It is directed to Israel, God's professing people. They are called to *return*. Note, Conversion must be preached even to those that are within the pale of the church as well as to heathen. "Thou art Israel, and therefore art bound to thy God in duty, gratitude, and interest; thy revolt from him is so much the more heinous, and thy return to him so much the more necessary." Let Israel see, 1. What work he has made for repentance: "*Thou hast fallen by thy iniquity.*" *Thou hast stumbled*; so some read it. Their idols were their *stumbling-blocks*. "*Thou hast fallen from God into sin, fallen off from all good, fallen down under the load of guilt and the curse.*" Note, Sin is a fall; and it concerns those that have fallen by sin to get up again by repentance. 2. What work he has to do in his repentance: "*Return to the Lord thy God*; return to him as the Lord whom thou hast a dependence upon, as *thy God*, thine in covenant, whom thou hast an interest in." Note, It is the great concern of those that have revolted from God to *return to God*, and so to do their *first works*. "Return to him from whom thou hast fallen, and who alone is able to raise thee up. Return *even to the Lord*, or *quite home* to the Lord; do not only look to him, or take some steps towards him, but make thorough work of it." The ancient Jews had a saying, grounded on this, *Repentance is a great thing, for it brings men quite up to the throne of glory.*

II. Necessary instructions given them how to repent. 1. They must bethink themselves what to say to God when they come to him: *Take with you words*. They are required to bring, not sacrifices and offerings, but penitential prayers and supplications, the *fruit of thy lips*, yet not of the lips only, but of the heart, else words are but wind. One of the rabbins says, They must be such words as proceed from what is spoken first in the inner man; the heart must dictate to the tongue. We must take good words with us, by taking good thoughts and good affections with us. *Verbaque præviam rem non invita sequentur*—Those who master a subject are seldom at a loss for language. Note, When we come to God we should consider what we have to say to him; for, if we come without an errand, we are likely to go without an answer. Ezra ix. 10, *What shall we say?* We must take with us words from the scripture, take them from the Spirit of grace and supplication, who teaches us to cry, Abba, Father, and makes intercession in us. 2. They must bethink themselves what to do. They must not only take with them words, but must *turn to the Lord*;

inwardly in their hearts, outwardly in their lives.

III. For their assistance herein, and encouragement, God is pleased to put words into their mouths, to teach them what they shall say. Surely we may hope to speed with God, when he himself has ordered our address to be drawn up ready to our hands, and his own Spirit has indited it for us; and no doubt we shall speed if the workings of our souls agree with the words here recommended to us. They are,

1. Petitioning words. Two things we are here directed to petition for:—(1.) To be acquitted from guilt. When we return to the Lord we must say to him, Lord, *take away all iniquity*. They were now smarting for sin, under the load of affliction, but are taught to pray, not as Pharaoh, *Take away this death*, but, *Take away this sin*. Note, When we are in affliction we should be more concerned for the forgiveness of our sins than for the removal of our trouble. "*Take away iniquity*, lift it off as a burden we are ready to sink under or as the stumbling-block which we have often fallen over. Lord, take it away, that it may not appear against us, to our confusion and condemnation. Take it all away by a free and full remission, for we cannot pretend to strike any of it off by a satisfaction of our own." When God pardons sin he pardons *all*, that *great debt*; and when we pray against sin we must pray against it all and not except any. (2.) To be accepted as righteous in God's sight: "*Receive us graciously*. Let us have thy favour and love, and have thou respect to us and to our performances. Receive our prayer graciously; be well pleased with that good which by thy grace we are enabled to do." *Take good* (so the word is); take it to bestow upon us, so the margin reads it—*Give good*. This follows upon the petition for the taking away of iniquity; for, till iniquity is taken away, we have no reason to expect any good from God, but the taking away of iniquity makes way for the conferring of good *removendo prohibens*—by taking that out of the way which hindered. *Give good*; they do not say what good, but refer themselves to God; it is not good of the world's showing (Ps. iv. 6), but good of God's giving. "*Give good*, that good which we have forfeited, and which thou hast promised, and which the necessity of our case calls for." Note, God's gracious acceptance, and the blessed fruits and tokens of that acceptance, are to be earnestly desired and prayed for by us in our returning to God. "*Give good*, that good which will make us good and keep us from returning to iniquity again."

2. Promising words. These also are put into their mouths, not to move God, or to oblige him to show them mercy, but to move themselves, and oblige themselves to returns of duty. Note, Our prayers for pardon and



acceptance with God should be always accompanied with sincere purposes and vows of new obedience. Two things they are to promise and vow:—(1.) Thanksgiving. “Pardon our sins, and accept of us, so *will we render the calves of our lips.*” The fruit of our lips (so the LXX.), a word they used for burnt-offerings, and so it agrees with the Hebrew. The apostle quotes this phrase (Heb. xiii. 15), and by the fruit of our lips understands the sacrifice of praise to God, giving thanks to his name. Note, Praise and thanksgiving are our spiritual sacrifice, and, if they come from an upright heart, shall please the Lord *better than an ox or bullock*, Ps. lxi. 30, 31. And the sense of our pardon and acceptance with God will enlarge our hearts in praise and thankfulness. Those that are *received graciously* may, and must, *render the calves of their lips*—poor returns for rich receivings, yet, if sincere, more acceptable than the calves of the stall. (2.) Amendment of life. They are taught to promise, not only verbal acknowledgments, but a real reformation. And we are taught here, [1.] In our returns to God to covenant against sin. We cannot expect that God should take it away by forgiving it if we do not put it away by forsaking it. [2.] To be particular in our covenants and resolutions against sin, as we ought to be in our confession, because deceit lies in generals. [3.] To covenant especially and expressly against those sins which we have been most subject to, which have most easily beset us, and which we have been most frequently overcome by. We must keep ourselves from, and therefore must thus fortify ourselves against, *our own iniquity*, Ps. xviii. 23. The sin they here covenant against, owning thereby that they had been guilty of it, is giving that glory to another which is due to God only; this they promise they will never do, *First*, By putting that confidence in creatures which should be put in God only. They will not trust to their alliances abroad: *Asshur* (that is, Assyria) *shall not save us.* “We will not court the help of the Assyrians when we are in distress, as we have done (*ch.* v. 13; vii. 11; viii. 9); we will not contract for it, nor will we confide in it, or depend upon it. Having a God to go to, a God all-sufficient to trust to, we scorn to be beholden to the Assyrians for help.” They will not trust to their warlike preparations at home, especially not those which they were forbidden to multiply: “*We will not ride upon horses*, that is, we will not make court to Egypt,” for thence they fetched their horses, Deut. xvii. 16; Isa. xxx. 16; xxxi. 1, 3. “When our enemies invade us we will depend upon our God to succour our infantry, and will be in no care to remount our cavalry.” Or, “We will not *post on horseback*, for haste, from one creature to another, to seek relief, but will take the nearest way, and the only sure way, by addressing

ourselves to God,” Isa. xx. 5. Note, True repentance takes us off from trusting to an arm of flesh, and brings us to rely on God only for all the good we stand in need of. *Secondly*, Nor will they do it by paying that homage to creatures which is due to God only. *We will not say any more to the works of our hands, You are our gods.* They must promise never to worship idols again, and for a good reason, because it is the most absurd and senseless thing in the world to pray to that as a god which is the work of our hands. We must promise that we will not set our hearts upon the gains of this world, nor pride ourselves in our external performances in religion, for that is, in effect, to say to the work of our hands, *You are our gods.*

3. Pleading words are here put into their mouths: *For in thee the fatherless find mercy.* We must take our encouragement in prayer, not from any merit God finds in us, but purely from the mercy we hope to find in God. This contains in itself a great truth, that God takes special care of fatherless children, Ps. lxxviii. 4, 5. So he did in his law, Exod. xxii. 22. So he does in his providence, Ps. xxvii. 10. It is God’s prerogative to help the helpless. In him there is mercy for such, for they are proper objects of mercy. In him they find it; there it is laid up for them, and there they must seek it; *seek and you shall find.* It comes in here as a good plea for mercy and grace and an encouraging one to their faith. (1.) They plead the distress of their state and condition: “We are fatherless orphans, destitute of help.” Those may expect to find help in God that are truly sensible of their helplessness in themselves and are willing to acknowledge it. This is a good step towards comfort. “If we have not yet boldness to call God *Father*, yet we look upon ourselves as fatherless without him, and therefore lay ourselves at his feet, to be looked upon by him with compassion.” (2.) They plead God’s wonted lovingkindness to such as were in that condition: *With thee the fatherless not only may find, but does find, and shall find, mercy.* It is a great encouragement to our faith and hope, in returning to God, that it is his glory to father the fatherless and help the helpless.

4 I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. 5 I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. 6 His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. 7 They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the



vine: the scent thereof *shall be* as the wine of Lebanon.

We have here an answer of peace to the prayers of returning Israel. They seek God's face, and they shall not *seek in vain*. God will be sure to meet those in a way of mercy who return to him in a way of duty. If we speak to God in good prayers, God will speak to us in good promises, as he *answered the angel with good words and comfortable words*, Zech. i. 13. If we take with us the foregoing words in our coming to God, we may take home with us these following words for our faith to feast upon; and see how these answer those.

I. Do they dread and deprecate God's displeasure, and therefore return to him? He assures them that, upon their submission, his *anger is turned away from them*. This is laid as the ground of all the other favours here promised. I will do so and so, for my *anger is turned away*, and thereby a door is opened for all good to flow to them, Isa. xii. 1. Note, Though God is justly and greatly angry with sinners, yet he is not implacable in his anger; it may be turned away; it shall be turned away, from those that turn away from their iniquity. God will be reconciled to those that are reconciled to him and to his whole will.

II. Do they pray for the *taking away of iniquity*? He assures them that he will *heal their backslidings*; so he promised, Jer. iii. 22. Note, Though backslidings from God are the dangerous diseases and wounds of the soul, yet they are not incurable, for God has graciously promised that if backsliding sinners will apply to him as their physician, and comply with his methods, he will heal their backslidings. He will heal the guilt of their backslidings by pardoning mercy and their *bent to backslide* by renewing grace. *Their iniquity shall not be their ruin*.

III. Do they pray that God will receive them graciously? In answer to that, behold, it is promised, *I will love them freely*. God had hated them while they went on sin (ch. ix. 15); but now that they return and repent he loves them, not only ceases to be *angry* with them, but takes complacency in them and designs their good. He *loves them freely*, with an *absolute entire* love (so some), so that there are no remains of his former displeasure, with a *liberal bountiful* love (so others); he will be open-handed in his love to them, and will think nothing too much to bestow upon them or to do for them. Or with a *cheerful willing* love; he will love them without reluctance or renitency. He will not say in the day of thy repentance, *How shall I receive thee again?* as he said in the day of thy apostasy, *How shall I give thee up?* Or with an *unmerited preventing* love. Whom God loves he loves *freely*, not because they deserve it, but of his own good pleasure. He loves because he *will* love, Deut. vii. 7, 8.

IV. Do they pray that God will *give good*, will make them good? In answer to that, behold it is promised, *I will be as the dew unto Israel*, v. 5. Observe,

1. What shall be the favour God will bestow upon them. It is the blessing of their father Jacob, *God give thee the dew of heaven*, Gen. xxvii. 28. Nay, what they need God will not only give them, but he will himself be *that* to them, all that which they need: *I will be as the dew unto Israel*. This ensures *spiritual blessings in heavenly things*; and it follows upon the healing of their backslidings, for pardoning mercy is always accompanied with renewing grace. Note, To Israelites indeed God himself will be *as the dew*. He will instruct them; his doctrine shall drop upon them as the dew, Deut. xxxii. 2. They shall know more and more of him, for he will come to them *as the rain*, Hos. vi. 3. He will refresh them with his comforts, so that their souls shall be as a *watered garden*, Isa. lviii. 11. He will be to true penitents *as the dew to Israel* when they were in the wilderness, dew that had manna in it, Exod. xvi. 14; Num. xi. 9. The graces of the Spirit are the hidden manna, hidden in the dew; God will give them bread from heaven, as he did to Israel in the dew in abundance, John i. 16.

2. What shall be the fruit of that favour which shall be produced in them. The grace thus freely bestowed on them *shall not be in vain*. Those souls, those Israelites, to whom God is as the dew, on whom his grace distils,

(1.) Shall be growing. The bad being by the grace of God made good, they shall by the same grace be made better; for grace, wherever it is true, is growing. [1.] They shall grow upwards, and be more flourishing, *shall grow as the lily*, or (as some read it) *shall blossom as the rose*. The growth of the lily, as that of all bulbous roots, is very quick and speedy. The root of the lily seems lost in the ground all winter, but, when it is refreshed with the dews of the spring, it starts up in a little time; so the grace of God improves young converts sometimes very fast. The lily, when it has come to its height, is a lovely flower (Matt. vi. 29), so grace is the comeliness of the soul, Ezek. xvi. 14. It is the *beauty of holiness* that is produced by the *dew of the morning*, Ps. cx. 3. [2.] They shall grow downwards, and be more firm. The lily indeed grows fast, and grows fine, but it soon fades and is easily plucked up; and therefore it is here promised to Israel that with the flower of the lily he shall have the root of the cedar: He shall *cast forth his roots as Lebanon*, as the *trees of Lebanon*, which, having taken deep root, cannot be plucked up, Amos ix. 15. Note, Spiritual growth consists most in the growth of the root, which is out of sight. The more we depend upon Christ and draw sap and virtue from him, the more we act in religion from a principle and the more



stedfast and resolved we are in it, the more we *cast forth our roots*. [3.] They shall grow round about (v. 6): *His branches shall spread* on all sides. And (v. 7) he shall grow as the vine, whose branches extend furthest of any tree. Joseph was to be a fruitful bough, Gen. xlix. 22. When many are added to the church from without, when a hopeful generation rises up, then Israel's branches spread. When particular believers abound in good works, and increase in the knowledge of God and in every good gift, then their branches may be said to spread. The inward man is renewed day by day.

(2.) They shall be graceful and acceptable both to God and man. Grace is an amiable thing, and makes those that have it truly amiable. They are here compared to such trees as are pleasant, [1.] To the sight: *His beauty shall be as the olive-tree*, which is always green. The Lord called thy name a green olive-tree, Jer. xi. 16. Ordinances are the beauty of the church, and in them it is, and shall be, ever green. Holiness is the beauty of a soul; when those that believe with the heart make profession with the mouth, and justify and adorn that profession with an agreeable conversation, then their beauty is as the olive-tree, Ps. lii. 8. It is a promise to the trees of righteousness that their leaf shall not wither. [2.] To the smell: *His smell shall be as Lebanon* (v. 6) and his scent as the wine of Lebanon, v. 7. This was the praise of their father Jacob, *The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed*, Gen. xxvii. 27. The church is compared to a garden of spices (Cant. iv. 12, 14), which all her garments smell of. True believers are acceptable to God and approved of men. God smells a sweet savour from their spiritual sacrifices (Gen. viii. 21), and they are accepted of the multitude of their brethren. Grace is the perfume of the soul, the perfume of the name, makes it like precious ointment, Eccl. vii. 1. The memorial thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon (so the margin reads it), not only their reviving comforts now, but their surviving honours when they are gone, shall be as the wine of Lebanon, that has a delicate flavour. Flourishing churches have their faith spoken of throughout the world (Rom. i. 8) and leave their name to be remembered (Ps. xlv. 17); and the memory of flourishing saints is blessed, and shall be so, as theirs who by faith obtained a good report.

(3.) They shall be fruitful and useful. The church is compared here to the vine and the olive, which bring forth useful fruits, to the honour of God and man. Nay, the very shadow of the church shall be agreeable (v. 7): *Those that dwell under his shadow shall return*—under God's shadow (so some), under the shadow of the Messias, so the Chaldee. Believers dwell under God's shadow (Ps. xci. 1), and there they are and may be safe and easy. But it is rather under the

shadow of Israel, under the shadow of the church. Note, God's promises pertain to those, and those only, that dwell under the church's shadow, that attend on God's ordinances and adhere to his people, not those that flee to that shadow only for shelter in a hot gleam, but those that dwell under it, Ps. xxvii. 4. We may apply it to particular believers; when a man is effectually brought home to God all that dwell under his shadow fare the better for it—children, servants, subjects, friends. *This day has salvation come to this house*. Those that dwell under the shadow of this church shall return; their drooping spirits shall return, and they shall be refreshed and comforted. He restores my soul, Ps. xxiii. 3. *They shall revive as the corn*, which, when it is sown, dies first, and then revives, and brings forth much fruit, John xii. 24. It is promised that God's people shall be blessings to the world, as corn and wine are. And a very great and valuable mercy it is to be serviceable to our generation. Comfort and honour attend it.

8 Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree. From me is thy fruit found. 9 Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

Let us now hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

I. Concerning Ephraim; he is spoken of and spoken to, v. 8. Here we have,

1. His repentance and reformation: *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?* As some read it, God here reasons and argues with him, why he should renounce idolatry: "*O Ephraim! what to me and idols? What concord or agreement can there be between me and idols? What communion between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial?*" 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. Therefore thou must break off thy league with them if thou wilt come into covenant with me." As we read it, God promises to bring Ephraim and keep him to this: *Ephraim shall say*, God will put it into his heart to say it, *What have I to do any more with idols?* He had promised (v. 3) not to say any more to the works of his hands, *You are my gods*. But God's promises to us are much more our security and our strength for the mortifying of sin than our promises to God; and therefore God himself is here surety for his servant to good, will put it into his heart and into his mouth. And, whatever good we say or do at any time, it is he that works it in us. Ephraim had solemnly engaged not to call his idols his gods; but God here

engages further for him that he shall resolve to have *no more to do with them*. He shall abolish them, he shall abandon them, and that with the utmost detestation; for it is necessary not only that in our lives we be turned from sin, but that in our hearts we be turned against sin. See here, (1.) The power of divine grace. Ephraim had been *joined to idols* (ch. iv. 17), was so fond of them that one would have thought he could never fall out with them; and yet God will work such a change in him that he shall loathe them as much as ever he loved them. (2.) See the benefit of sanctified afflictions. Ephraim had smarted for his idolatry; it had brought one judgment after another upon him, and this at length is the fruit, even the *taking away of his sin*, Isa. xxvii. 9. (3.) See the nature of repentance; it is a firm and fixed resolution to have no more to do with sin. This is the language of a penitent: "I am ashamed that ever I had to do with sin; but I have had enough of it; I hate it, and by the grace of God I will never have any thing to do with it again, no, not with the occasions of it." Thou shalt say to thy idol, *Get thee hence* (Isa. xxx. 22), shalt say to the tempter, *Get thee behind me, Satan*.

2. The gracious notice God is pleased to take of it: *I have heard him, and observed him. I have heard, and will look upon him*; so some read it. Note, The God of heaven takes cognizance of the penitent reflections and resolutions of returning sinners. He expects and desires the repentance of sinners, because he has no pleasure in their ruin. *He looks upon men* (Job xxxiii. 27), *hearkens and hears*, Jer. viii. 6. And, if there be any disposition to repent, he is well pleased with it. When *Ephraim bemoans himself* before God, he is a *dear son*, he is a *pleasant child*, Jer. xxxi. 20. He meets penitents with mercy, as the father of the prodigal met his returning son. God *observed* Ephraim, to see whether he would bring forth fruits meet for this profession of repentance that he made, and whether he would continue in this good mind. He observed him to do him good, and comfort him, according to the exigences of his case.

3. The mercy God designed for him, in order to his comfort and perseverance in his resolutions; still God will be all in all to him. Before, Israel was compared to a tree, now God compares himself to one. He will be to his people, (1.) As the branches of a tree: "*I am like a green fir-tree*, and will be so to thee." The fir-trees, in those countries, were exceedingly large and thick, and a shelter against sun and rain. God will be to all true converts both a delight and a defence; under his protection and influence they shall both dwell in safety and dwell at ease. He will be either a *sun and a shield* or a *shade and a shield*, according as their case requires. They shall sit down *under his shadow with delight*, Cant. ii. 3. He will be

so all weathers, Isa. iv. 6. (2.) As the root of a tree: *From me is thy fruit found*, which may be understood either of the fruit brought forth to us (to him we owe all our comforts) or of the fruit brought forth by us—from him we receive grace and strength to enable us to do our duty. Whatever fruits of righteousness we bring forth, all the praise of them is due to God; for he works in us both to will and to do that which is good.

II. Concerning every one that hears and reads the words of the prophecy of this book (v. 9): *Who is wise? and he shall understand these things*. Perhaps the prophet was wont to conclude the sermons he preached with these words, and now he closes with them the whole book, in which he had committed to writing some fragments of the many sermons he had preached. Observe, 1. The character of those that do profit by the truths he delivered: *Who is wise and prudent? He shall understand these things, he shall know them*. Those that set themselves to understand and know these things thereby make it to appear that they are truly wise and prudent, and will thereby be made more so; and, if any do not understand and know them, it is because they are foolish and unwise. Those that are wise in the doing of their duty, that are prudent in practical religion, are most likely to know and understand both the truths and providences of God, which are a mystery to others, John vii. 17. *The secret of the Lord is with those that fear him*, Ps. xxv. 14. *Who is wise?* This intimates a desire that those who read and hear these things would understand them (*O that they were wise!*) and a complaint that few were so—*Who has believed our report?* 2. The excellency of the things concerning which we are here instructed: *The ways of the Lord are right*; and therefore it is our wisdom and duty to know and understand them. The way of God's precepts, in which he requires us to walk, is right, agreeing with the rules of eternal reason and equity and having a direct tendency to our eternal felicity. The ways of God's providence, in which he walks towards us, are all right; no fault is to be found with any thing that God does, for it is all well done. His judgments upon the impenitent, his favours to the penitent, are all right; however they may be perverted and misinterpreted, God will at last be justified and glorified in them all. His *ways are equal*. 3. The different use which men make of them. (1.) The right ways of God to those that are good are, and will be, a savour of life unto life: *The just shall walk in them*; they shall conform to the will of God both in his precepts and in his providences, and shall have the comfort of so doing. They shall well understand the mind of God both in his word and in his works; they shall be well reconciled to both, and shall accommodate themselves to God's intention in both. *The just shall walk in*



those ways towards their great end, and shall not come short of it. (2.) The right ways of God will be to those that are wicked a savour of death unto death: *The transgressors shall fall* not only in their own wrong ways, but even *in the right ways of the Lord*. Christ, who is a foundation stone to some, is to others a *stone of stumbling* and a *rock of offence*. That which was *ordained to life* becomes, through their abuse of it, death to them. God's providences, being not duly improved by them, harden them in sin and contribute to their ruin. God's discovery of

himself both in the judgments of his mouth and in the judgments of his hand is to us according as we are affected under it. *Recipitur ad modum recipientis—What is received influences according to the qualities of the receiver*. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay. But of all transgressors those certainly have the most dangerous fatal falls that fall *in the ways of God*, that split on the rock of ages, and suck poison out of the balm of Gilead. *Let the sinners in Zion be afraid of this*.

AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET  
J O E L.

WE are altogether uncertain concerning the time when this prophet prophesied; it is probable that it was about the same time that Amos prophesied, not for the reason that the rabbin give, "Because Amos begins his prophecy with that wherewith Joel concludes his, *The Lord shall roar out of Zion*," but for the reason Dr. Lightfoot gives, "Because he speaks of the same judgments of locusts, and drought, and fire, that Amos laments, which is an intimation that they appeared about the same time, Amos in Israel and Joel in Judah. Hosea and Obadiah prophesied about the same time; and it appears that Amos prophesied in the days of Jeroboam, the second king of Israel, Amos vii. 10. God sent a variety of prophets, that they might strengthen the hands one of another, and that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established. In this prophecy, I. The desolations made by hosts of noxious insects is described, *ch. i.* and part of *ch. ii.* II. The people are hereupon called to repentance, *ch. ii.* III. Promises are made of the return of mercy upon their repentance (*ch. ii.*), and promises of the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days. IV. The cause of God's people is pleaded against their enemies, whom God would in due time reckon with (*ch. iii.*); and glorious things are spoken of the gospel-Jerusalem and of the prosperity and perpetuity of it.

#### CHAP. I.

This chapter is the description of a lamentable devastation made of the country of Judah by locusts and caterpillars. Some think that the prophet speaks of it as a thing to come and gives warning of it beforehand, as usually the prophets did of judgments coming. Others think that it was now present, and that his business was to affect the people with it and awaken them by it to repentance. I. It is spoken of as a judgment which there was no precedent of in former ages, *ver. 1—7.* II. All sorts of people sharing in the calamity are called upon to lament it, *ver. 8—13.* III. They are directed to look up to God in their lamentations, and to humble themselves before him, *ver. 14—20.*

**T**HE word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. 2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children

another generation. 4 That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. 5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. 6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek-teeth of a great lion. 7 He hath laid my vine waste, and

barked my fig-tree : he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away ; the branches thereof are made white.

It is a foolish fancy which some of the Jews have, that this Joel the prophet was the same with that Joel who was the son of Samuel (1 Sam. viii. 2) ; yet one of their rabbins very gravely undertakes to show why Samuel is here called *Pethuel*. This Joel was long after that. He here speaks of a sad and sore judgment which was now brought, or to be brought, upon Judah, for their sins. Observe,

I. The greatness of the judgment, expressed here in two things :—1. It was such as could not be paralleled in the ages that were past, in history, or in the memory of any living, v. 2. The *old men* are appealed to, who could remember what had happened long ago ; nay, and *all the inhabitants of the land* are called on to testify, if they could any of them remember the like. Let them go further than any man's memory, and *prepare themselves for the search of their fathers* (Job viii. 8), and they would not find an account of the like in any record. Note, Those that outdo their predecessors in sin may justly expect to fall under greater and sorer judgments than any of their predecessors knew. 2. It was such as would not be forgotten in the ages to come (v. 3) : “ *Tell you your children of it* ; let them know what dismal tokens of the wrath of God you have been under, that they may take warning, and may learn obedience by the things which you have suffered, for it is designed for warning to them also. Yea, let *your children tell their children, and their children another generation* ; let them tell it not only as a strange thing, which may serve for matter of talk” (as such uncommon accidents are recorded in our almanacs—It is so long since the plague, and fire—so long since the great frost, and the great wind), “ *but let them tell it to teach their children to stand in awe of God and of his judgments, and to tremble before him.*” Note, We ought to transmit to posterity the memorial of God's judgments as well as of his mercies.

II. The judgment itself ; it is an invasion of the country of Judea by a great army. Many interpreters both ancient and modern understand it of armies of men, the forces of the Assyrians, which, under Sennacherib, took all the *defenced cities of Judah*, and then, no doubt, made havoc of the country and destroyed the products of it ; nay, some make the four sorts of animals here named (v. 4) to signify the four monarchies which, in their turns, were oppressive to the people of the Jews, one destroying what had escaped the fury of the other. Many of the Jewish expositors think it is a parabolical expression of the coming of enemies, and their multitude, to lay all waste. So the Chaldee paraphrast mentions these animals (v. 4) ; but

afterwards (ch. ii. 25) puts instead of them, *Nations, peoples, tongues, languages, potentates, and revenging kingdoms*. But it seems much rather to be understood literally of armies of insects coming upon the land and eating up the fruits of it. Locusts were one of the plagues of Egypt. Of them it is said, There never were any like them, nor should be (Exod. x. 14), none such as those in Egypt, none such as these in Judah—none like those locusts for bigness, none like these for multitude and the mischief they did. The plague of locusts in Egypt lasted but for a few days ; this seems to have continued for four years successively (as some think), because here are four sorts of insects mentioned (v. 4), one destroying what the other left ; but others think they came all in one year. We are not told, in the history of the Old Testament, when this happened, but we are sure that no word of God fell to the ground ; and, though a devastation by these insects is primarily intended here, yet it is expressed in such language as is very applicable to the destruction of the country by a foreign enemy invading it, because, if the people were not humbled and reformed by that less judgment which devoured the land, God would send this greater upon them, which would devour the inhabitants ; and by the description of that they are bidden to take it for a warning. If this nation of worms do not subdue them, another nation shall come to ruin them. Observe, 1. What these animals are that are sent against them—*locusts and caterpillars, palmer-worms and canker-worms*, v. 4. We cannot now describe how these differed one from another ; they were all little insects, any one of them despicable, and which a man might easily crush with his foot or with his finger ; but when they came in vast swarms, or shoals, they were very formidable and ate up all before them. Note, God is Lord of hosts, has all creatures at his command, and, when he pleases, can humble and mortify a proud and rebellious people by the weakest and most contemptible creatures. Man is said to be a worm ; and by this it appears that he is *less than a worm*, for, when God pleases, worms are too hard for him, plunder his country, eat up that for which he laboured, destroy the forage, and cut off the subsistence of a potent nation. The weaker the instrument is that God employs the more is his power magnified. 2. What force and fury they came with. They are here called a *nation* (v. 6), because they are embodied, and act by consent, and as it were with a common design ; for, though the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands (Prov. xxx. 27), and it is there mentioned as an instance of their wisdom. It is prudence for those that are weak severally to unite and act jointly. They are *strong*, for they are *without number*. The *small dust of the balance* is light, and easily blown away, but a heap



of dust is weighty; so a worm can do little (yet one worm served to destroy Jonah's gourd), but numbers of them can do wonders. They are said to have the *teeth of a lion*, of a *great lion*, because of the great and terrible execution they do. Note, Locusts become as lions when they come armed with a divine commission. We read of the locusts out of the bottomless pit, that *their teeth were as the teeth of lions*, Rev. ix. 8. 3. What mischief they do. They *eat up* all before them (v. 4); what one leaves the other devours; they destroy not only the grass and corn, but the trees (v. 7): *The vine is laid waste*. These vermin eat the leaves which should be a shelter to the fruit while it ripens, and so that also perishes and comes to nothing. They eat the very bark of the fig-tree, and so kill it. Thus the *fig-tree does not blossom*, nor is there *fruit in the vine*.

III. A call to the drunkards to lament this judgment (v. 5): *Awake and weep, all you drinkers of wine*. This intimates, 1. That they should suffer very sensibly by this calamity. It should touch them in a tender part; the *new wine* which they loved so well should be *cut off from their mouth*. Note, It is just with God to take away those comforts which are abused to luxury and excess, to *recover the corn and wine* which are *prepared* for Baal, which are made the food and fuel of a base lust. And to them judgments of that kind are most grievous. The more men place their happiness in the gratifications of sense the more pressing temporal afflictions are upon them. The drinkers of water needed not to care when the vine was laid waste; they could live as well without it as they had done; it was no trouble to the Nazarites. But the *drinkers of wine will weep and howl*. The more delights we make necessary to our satisfaction the more we expose ourselves to trouble and disappointment. 2. It intimates that they had been very senseless and stupid under the former tokens of God's displeasure; and therefore they are here called to *awake and weep*. Those that will not be roused out of their security by the word of God shall be roused by his rod; those that will not be startled by judgments at a distance shall be themselves arrested by them; and when they are going to partake of the forbidden fruit a prohibition of another nature shall come *between the cup and the lip*, and *cut off the wine from their mouth*.

8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. 9 The meat-offering and the drink-offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn. 10 The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. 11 Be ye ashamed,

O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vine-dressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. 12 The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate-tree, the palm-tree also, and the apple-tree, *even* all the trees of the field, are withered; because joy is withered away from the sons of men. 13 Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat-offering and the drink-offering is withholden from the house of your God.

The judgment is here described as very lamentable, and such as all sorts of people should share in; it shall not only rob the drunkards of their pleasure (if that were the worst of it, it might be the better borne), but it shall deprive others of their necessary subsistence, who are therefore called to lament (v. 8), as a virgin laments the death of her lover to whom she was espoused, but not completely married, yet so that he was in effect her husband, or as a young woman lately married, from whom the *husband of her youth*, her young husband, or the husband to whom she was married when she was young, is suddenly taken away by death. Between a new-married couple that are young, that married for love, and that are every way amiable and agreeable to each other, there is great fondness, and consequently great grief if either be taken away. Such lamentation shall there be for the loss of their corn and wine. Note, The more we are wedded to our creature-comforts the harder it is to part with them. See that parallel place, Isa. xxxii. 10—12. Two sorts of people are here brought in, as concerned to lament this devastation, countrymen and clergymen.

I. Let the husbandmen and vine-dressers lament, v. 11. Let them be ashamed of the care and pains they have taken about their vineyards, for it will be all labour lost, and they shall gain no advantage by it; they shall see the fruit of their labour eaten up before their eyes, and shall not be able to save any of it. Note, Those who labour only for the *meat that perishes* will, sooner or later, be ashamed of their labour. The *vine-dressers* will then express their extreme grief by *howling*, when they see their vineyards stripped of leaves and fruit, and the vines withered, so that nothing is to be had or hoped for from them, wherewith they might pay their rent and maintain their families. The destruction is particularly described here: *The field is laid waste* (v. 10); all is consumed that it produced; *the land*

*mourns*; the ground has a melancholy aspect, and looks ruefully; all the inhabitants of the land are in tears for what they have lost, are in fears of perishing for want, Isa. xxiv. 4; Jer. iv. 28. "The *corn*, the bread-corn, which is the staff of life, is *wasted*; the *new wine*, which should be brought into the cellars for a supply when the old is drunk, is *dried up*, is *ashamed* of having promised so fair what it is not now able to perform; the oil *linguishes*, or is *diminished*, because (as the Chaldee renders it) *the olives have fallen off*." The people were not thankful to God as they should have been for the *bread that strengthens man's heart*, the *wine that makes glad the heart*, and the *oil that makes the face to shine* (Ps. civ. 14, 15); and therefore they are justly brought to lament the loss and want of them, of all the products of the earth, which God had given them either for necessity or for delight (this is repeated, v. 11, 12)—the *wheat and barley*, the two principal grains bread was then made of, wheat for the rich and barley for the poor, so that the rich and poor meet together in the calamity. The trees are destroyed, not only the *vine and the fig-tree* (as before, v. 7), which were more useful and necessary, but other trees also that were for delight—the *pomegranate*, *palm-tree*, and *apple-tree*, yea, all the *trees of the field*, as well as those of the orchard, timber-trees as well as fruit-trees. In short, all *the harvest of the field has perished*, v. 11. And by this means *joy has withered away from the children of men* (v. 11); the *joy of harvest*, which is used to express great and general joy, has come to nothing, is turned into shame, is turned into lamentation. Note, The perishing of the harvest is the withering of the joy of the children of men. Those that place their happiness in the delights of sense, when they are deprived of them, or in any way disturbed in the enjoyment of them, lose all their joy; whereas the children of God, who look upon the pleasures of sense with holy indifference and contempt, and know what it is to make God their hearts' delight, can rejoice in him as the *God of their salvation* even when the *fig-tree does not blossom*; spiritual joy is so far from withering then, that it flourishes more than ever, Hab. iii. 17, 18. Let us see here, 1. What perishing uncertain things all our creature-comforts are. We can never be sure of the continuance of them. Here the heavens had given their rains in due season, the earth had yielded her strength, and, when the appointed weeks of harvest were at hand, they saw no reason to doubt but that they should have a very plentiful crop; yet then they are invaded by these unthought-of enemies, that lay all waste, and not by fire and sword. It is our wisdom not to lay up our treasure in those things which are liable to so many untoward accidents. 2. See what need we have to live in a continual dependence upon

God and his providence, for our own hands are not sufficient for us. When we see the *full corn in the ear*, and think we are sure of it—nay, when we have *brought it home*, if he *blow upon it*, nay, if he do not bless it, we are not likely to have any good of it. 3. See what ruinous work sin makes. A paradise is turned into a wilderness, a fruitful land, the most fruitful land upon earth, into *barrenness*, for the *iniquity of those that dwell therein*.

II. Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, lament, for they share deeply in the calamity: *Gird yourselves with sackcloth* (v. 13); nay, they *do mourn*, v. 9. Observe, The priests are called the *ministers of the altar*, for on that they attended, and the *ministers of the Lord* (of *my God*, says the prophet), for in attending on the altar they served him, did his work, and did him honour. Note, Those that are employed in holy things are therein God's ministers, and on him they attend. The ministers of the altar used to rejoice before the Lord, and to spend their time very much in singing; but now they must *lament and howl*, for the *meat-offering and drink-offering were cut off from the house of the Lord* (v. 9), and the same again (v. 13), *from the house of your God*. "He is your God in a particular manner; you are in a nearer relation to him than other Israelites are; and therefore it is expected that you should be more concerned than others for that which is a hindrance to the service of his sanctuary." It is intimated, 1. That the people, as long as they had the fruits of the earth brought in in their season, presented to the Lord his dues out of them, and brought the offerings to the altar and tithes to those that served at the altar. Note, A people may be filling up the measure of their iniquity apace, and yet may keep up a course of external performances in religion. 2. That, when the meat and drink failed, the meat-offering and drink-offering failed of course; and this was the sorest instance of the calamity. Note, As far as any public trouble is an obstruction to the course of religion it is to be upon that account, more than any other, sadly lamented, especially by the priests, the Lord's ministers. As far as poverty occasions the decay of piety and the neglect of divine offices, and starves the cause of religion among a people, it is indeed a sore judgment. When the famine prevailed God could not have his sacrifices, nor could the priests have their maintenance; and therefore let *the Lord's ministers mourn*.

14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land *into* the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD, 15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and



as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. 16 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, *yea*, joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. 18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; *yea*, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. 19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. 20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

We have observed abundance of tears shed for the destruction of the fruits of the earth by the locusts; now here we have those tears turned into the right channel, that of repentance and humiliation before God. The judgment was very heavy, and here they are directed to own the hand of God in it, his *mighty hand*, and to *humble themselves* under it. Here is,

I. A proclamation issued out for a general fast. The priests are ordered to appoint one; they must not only mourn themselves, but they must call upon others to mourn too: "*Sanctify a fast*"; let some time be set apart from all worldly business to be spent in the exercises of religion, in the expressions of repentance and other extraordinary instances of devotion." Note, Under public judgments there ought to be public humiliations; for by them the *Lord God calls to weeping and mourning*. With all the marks of sorrow and shame sin must be confessed and bewailed, the righteousness of God must be acknowledged, and his favour implored. Observe what is to be done by a nation at such a time. 1. A day is to be appointed for this purpose, a *day of restraint* (so the margin reads it), a day in which people must be restrained from their other ordinary business (that they may the more closely attend God's service), and from all bodily refreshments; for, 2. It must be a *fast*, a religious abstaining from meat and drink, further than is of absolute necessity. The king of Nineveh appointed a fast, in which they were to *taste nothing*, Jonah iii. 7. Hereby we own ourselves unworthy of our necessary food, and that we have forfeited it and deserve to be wholly deprived of it, we punish ourselves and mortify the body, which has been the occasion of sin, we keep it in a frame fit to serve the soul in serving God, and, by the appetite's craving

food, the desires of the soul towards that which is better than life, and all the supports of it, are excited. This was in a special manner seasonable now that God was depriving them of their *meat and drink*; for hereby they accommodated themselves to the affliction they were under. When God says, *You shall fast*, it is time to say, *We will fast*. 3. There must be a solemn assembly. The *elders* and the *people*, magistrates and subjects, must be *gathered together*, even *all the inhabitants of the land*, that God might be honoured by their public humiliations, that they might thereby take the more shame to themselves, and that they might excite and stir up one another to the religious duties of the day. All had contributed to the national guilt, all shared in the national calamity, and therefore they must all join in the professions of repentance. 4. They must come together in the temple, *the house of the Lord* their *God*, because that was the house of prayer, and there they might hope to meet with God because it was the place which he had *chosen to put his name there*, there they might hope to speed because it was a type of Christ and his mediation. Thus they interested themselves in Solomon's prayer for the acceptance of all the requests that should be put up in or towards this house, in which their present case was particularly mentioned. 1 Kings viii. 37, *If there be locust, if there be caterpillar*. 5. They must *sanctify* this fast, must observe it in a religious manner, with sincere devotion. What is a fast worth if it be not sanctified? 6. They must *cry unto the Lord*. To him they must make their complaint and offer up their supplication. When we cry in our affliction we must *cry to the Lord*; this is *fasting to him*, Zech. vii. 5.

II. Some considerations suggested to induce them to proclaim this fast and to observe it strictly.

1. God was beginning a controversy with them. It is time to *cry unto the Lord*, for *the day of the Lord is at hand*, v. 15. Either they mean the continuance and consequences of this present judgment which they now saw but breaking in upon them, or some greater judgments which this was but a preface to. However it be, this they are taught to make the matter of their lamentation: *Alas, for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand*. Therefore cry to God. For, (1.) "The day of his judgment is very near, it is *at hand*; it will not *slumber*, and therefore you should not. It is time to fast and pray, for you have but a little time to turn yourselves in." (2.) It will be very terrible; there is no escaping it, no resisting it: *As a destruction from the Almighty shall it come*. See Isa. xiii. 6. It is not a correction, but a destruction; and it comes from the hand, not of a weak creature, but *of the Almighty*; and *who knows* (nay, who does not know) *the power of his anger*? Whither should we



go with our cries but to him from whom the judgment we dread comes? There is no fleeing from him but by fleeing to him, no escaping destruction from the Almighty but by making our submission and supplication to the Almighty; this is *taking hold on his strength, that we may make peace*, Isa. xxvii. 5.

2. They saw themselves already under the tokens of his displeasure. It is time to fast and pray, for their distress is very great, v. 16. (1.) Let them look into their own houses, and there was no plenty there, as used to be. Those who kept a good table were now obliged to retrench: *Is not the meat cut off before our eyes?* We see it wherever we go. Note, Though it is common for the heart not to rue what the eye sees not, yet that heart is hard indeed which trembles not, and humbles not itself, when God's judgments are *before the eyes*. If, when God's hand is lifted up, men *will not see*, when his hand is laid on *they shall see*. Is not the meat many a time cut off before our eyes? Let us then labour for that spiritual meat which is not before our eyes, and which cannot be cut off. (2.) Let them look into God's house, and see the effects of the judgment there; joy and gladness were *cut off from the house of God*. Note, The house of our God is the proper place of joy and gladness; when David goes to the *altar of God*, it is to God *my exceeding joy*; but when *joy and gladness are cut off from God's house*, either by the corruption of holy things or the persecution of holy persons, when serious godliness decays and love waxes cold, then it is time to cry to the Lord, time to cry, *Alas!*

3. The prophet returns to describe the grievousness of the calamity, in some particulars of it. Corn and cattle are the husbandman's staple commodities; now here he is deprived of both these. (1.) The caterpillars have devoured the corn, v. 17. The *garners*, which they used to fill with corn, *are laid desolate*, and the *barns broken down*, because the *corn has withered*, and the owners think it not worth while to be at the charge of repairing them when they have nothing to put in them, nor are likely to have any thing; for *the seed is rotten under the clods*, either through too much rain or (which was the more common case in Canaan) for want of rain, or perhaps some insects under ground ate it up. When one crop fails the husbandman hopes the next may make it up; but here they despair of that, the seedness being as bad as the harvest. (2.) The cattle perish too for want of grass (v. 18): *How do the beasts groan!* This the prophet takes notice of, that the people might be affected with it and lay to heart the judgment. The groans of the cattle should soften their hard and impenitent hearts. *The herds of cattle, the large cattle (black cattle we call them), are perplexed*; nay, even the *flocks of sheep*, which will live upon a common and be con-

tent with very short grass, *are made desolate*. See here the inferior creatures suffering for our transgression, and groaning under the double burden of being serviceable to the sin of man and subject to the curse of God for it. *Cursed is the ground for thy sake*.

III. The prophet stirs them up to cry to God, with the consideration of the examples given them for it.

1. His own example (v. 19): *O Lord! to thee will I cry*. He would not put them upon doing that which he would not resolve to do himself; nay, whether they would do it or no, he would. Note, If God's ministers cannot prevail to affect others with the discoveries of divine wrath, yet they ought to be themselves affected with them; if they cannot bring others to cry to God, yet they must themselves be much in prayer. In time of trouble we must not only pray, but cry, must be fervent and importunate in prayer; and to God, from whom both the destruction is and the salvation must be, ought our cry to be always directed. That which engaged him to *cry to God* was, not so much any personal affliction, as the national calamity: *The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness*, which seems to be meant of some parching scorching heat of the sun, which was as fire to the fruits of the earth; it consumed them all. Note, When God *calls to contend by fire* it concerns those that have any interest in heaven to cry mightily to him for relief. See Num. xi. 2; Amos vii. 4, 5.

2. The example of the inferior creatures: *"The beasts of the field do not only groan, but cry unto thee, v. 20*. They appeal to thy pity, according to their capacity, and as if, though they are not capable of a rational and revealed religion, yet they had something of dependence upon God by natural instinct." At least, when they groan by reason of their calamity, he is pleased to interpret it as if they cried to him; much more will he put a favourable construction upon the groanings of his own children, though sometimes so feeble that they *cannot be uttered*, Rom. viii. 26. The beasts are here said to *cry unto God*, as from him the *lions seek their meat* (Ps. civ. 21) and the young *ravens*, Job xxxviii. 41. The complaints of the brute-creatures here are for want of water (*The rivers are dried up*, through the excessive heat), and for want of grass, for *the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness*. And what better are those than beasts who never cry to God but for corn and wine, and complain of nothing but the want of the delights of sense? Yet their crying to God in those cases shames the stupidity of those who cry not to God in any case.

#### CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. A further description of that terrible desolation which should be made in the land of Judah by the locusts and caterpillars, ver. 1—11. II. A serious call to the people, when they are under this sore judgment, to return and repent, to fast and pray, and to seek unto God for mercy, with directions how to



do this aright, ver. 12—17. III. A promise that, upon their repentance, God would remove the judgment, would repair the breaches made upon them by it, and restore unto them plenty of all good things, ver. 18—27. IV. A prediction of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah in the world, by the pouring out of the Spirit in the latter days, ver. 28—32. Thus the beginning of this chapter is made terrible with the tokens of God's wrath, but the latter end of it made comfortable with the assurances of his favour, and it is in the way of repentance that this blessed change is made; so that, though it is only the last paragraph of the chapter that points directly at gospel-times, yet the whole may be improved as a type and figure, representing the curses of the law invading men for their sins, and the comforts of the gospel flowing in to them upon their repentance.

**B**LOW ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for *it is nigh at hand*; 2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, *even to the years of many generations*. 3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land *is* as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. 4 The appearance of them *is* as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. 5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. 6 Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. 7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: 8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and *when* they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. 9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. 10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: 11 And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp *is* very great: for *he is* strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD *is*

great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

Here we have God contending with his own professing people for their sins and executing upon them the judgment written in the law (Deut. xxviii. 42), *The fruit of thy land shall the locust consume*, which was one of those diseases of Egypt that God would bring upon them, v. 60.

I. Here is the war proclaimed (v. 1): *Blow the trumpet in Zion*, either to call the invading army together, and then the trumpet sounds a charge, or rather to give notice to Judah and Jerusalem of the approach of the judgment, that they might *prepare to meet their God* in the way of his judgments and might endeavour by prayers and tears, the church's best artillery, to put by the stroke. It was the priests' business to sound the trumpet (Num. x. 8), both as an appeal to God in the day of their distress and a summons to the people to come together to seek his face. Note, It is the work of ministers to give warning from the word of God of the fatal consequences of sin, and to reveal his wrath from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. And though it is not the privilege of Zion and Jerusalem to be exempted from the judgments of God, if they provoke him, yet it is their privilege to be warned of them, that they may make their peace with him. Even in *the holy mountain the alarm must be sounded*, and then it sounds most dreadful, Amos iii. 2. Now, *shall a trumpet be blown in the city, in the holy city, and the people not be afraid?* Surely they will. Amos iii. 6. *Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble*; they shall be made to tremble by the judgment itself; let them therefore tremble at the alarm of it.

II. Here is a general idea given of the day of battle, which *cometh*, which is *nigh at hand*, and there is no avoiding it. It is the *day of the Lord*, the day of his judgment, in which he will both manifest and magnify himself. It is *a day of darkness and gloominess* (v. 2), literally so, the swarms of locusts and caterpillars being so large and so thick as to darken the sky (Exod. x. 15), or rather figuratively; it will be a melancholy time, a time of grievous affliction. And it will come *as the morning spread upon the mountains*; the darkness of this day will come as suddenly as the morning light, as irresistibly, will spread as far, and grow upon them as the morning light.

III. Here is the army drawn up in array (v. 2): They are *a great people, and a strong*. Any one that sees the vast numbers that there shall be of locusts and caterpillars, destroying the land, will say (as we are all apt to be most affected with what is present), "Surely, never was the like before, nor ever will be the like again." Note, Extraordinary judgments are rare things, and seldom happen,

which is an instance of God's patience. When God had drowned the world once he promised never to do it again. The army is her described to be, 1. Very bold and daring: *They are as horses*, as war-horses, that rush into the battle and *are not affrighted* (Job xxxix. 22); and as *horsemen*, carried on with martial fire and fury, *so they shall run*, v. 4. Some of the ancients have observed that the head of a locust is very like, in shape, to the head of a horse. 2. Very loud and noisy—*like the noise of chariots*, of many chariots, when driven furiously over rough ground, *on the tops of the mountains*, v. 5. Hence is borrowed part of the description of the locusts which St. John saw rise out of the bottomless pit. Rev. ix. 7, 9, *The shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared to the battle; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses running to the battle*. Historians tell us that the noise made by swarms of locusts in those countries that are infested with them has sometimes been heard six miles off. The noise is likewise compared to that of a *roaring fire*; it is like the *noise of a flame that devours the stubble*, which noise is the more terrible because that which it is the indication of is devouring. Note, When God's judgments are abroad they make a great noise; and it is necessary for the awakening of a secure and stupid world that they should do so. (3.) They are very regular, and keep ranks in their march; though numerous and greedy of spoil, yet they are *as a strong people set in battle array* (v. 5): *They shall march every one on his ways*, straight forward, as if they had been trained up by the discipline of war to keep their post and observe their right-hand man. *They shall not break their ranks, nor one thrust another*, v. 7, 8. Their number and swiftness shall breed no confusion. See how God can make creatures to act by rule that have no reason to act by, when he designs to serve his own purposes by them. And see how necessary it is that those who are employed in any service for God should observe order, and keep ranks, should diligently go on in their own work and not stand in one another's way. 4. They are very *swift*; they *run like horsemen* (v. 4), *run like mighty men* (v. 7); they *run to and fro in the city*, and *run upon the wall*, v. 9. When God *sends forth his command on earth* his word *runs very swiftly*, Ps. cxlvii. 15. Angels have wings, and so have locusts, when God makes use of them.

IV. Here is the terrible execution done by this formidable army, 1. In the country, v. 3. View the army in the front, and you will see a *fire devouring before them*; they consume all as if they breathed fire. View it in the rear, and you will see those that come behind as furious as the foremost: *Behind them a flame burns*. When they are gone, then it will appear what destruction they have made. Look upon the fields that

they have not yet invaded, and they are *as the garden of Eden*, pleasant to the eye, and full of good fruits; they are the pride and glory of the country. But look upon the fields that they have eaten up and they are *as a desolate wilderness*; one would not think that these had ever been like the former, and yet so they were perhaps but the day before, or that those should ever be made like these, and yet so they shall be perhaps by to-morrow night; yea, and *nothing shall escape them* that can possibly be made food for them. Let none be proud of the beauty of their grounds any more than of their bodies, for God can soon change the face of both. 2. In the city. They shall *climb the wall* (v. 7), they shall *run upon the houses*, and *enter in at the windows like a thief* (v. 9); when Egypt was plagued with locusts, they filled *Pharaoh's houses* and the *houses of his servants*, Exod. x. 5, 6. The locusts out of the bottomless pit, Satan's emissaries, and missionaries of the man of sin, do as these locusts. God's judgments too, when they come with commission, cannot be kept out with bars and bolts; they will find or force their way.

V. The impressions that should hereby be made upon the people. They shall find it to no purpose to make opposition. These enemies are invulnerable and therefore irresistible: *When they fall upon the sword they shall not be wounded*, v. 8. And those that cannot be hurt cannot be stopped; and therefore *before they faces the people shall be much pained* (v. 6), as the merchants are in pain for their trading ships when they hear that they are just in the mouth of a squadron of the enemies. "One is in pain for his field, another for his vineyard, and all faces gather blackness," which denotes the utmost consternation imaginable. Men in fear look pale, but men in despair look black; the whiteness of a sudden fright, when it is settled, turns into blackness. What is the matter of our pride and pleasure God can soon make the matter of our pain. The terror that the country should be in is described (v. 10) by figurative expressions: *The earth shall quake and the heavens tremble*; even the hearts that seemed undaunted, so firm that nothing would frighten them, as immoveable as heaven or earth, shall be seized with astonishment. Or when the inhabitants of the land are made to quake it seems to them as if all about them trembled too. Through the prevalency of their fear, or for want of the supports of life which they used to have, their eye shall wax dim and their sight fail them, so that to them *the sun and moon shall seem to be dark*, and the stars to *withdraw their shining*. Note, When God frowns upon men the lights of heaven will be small joy to them; for man, by rebelling against his Creator, has forfeited the benefit of all the creatures. But, though this is to be understood figuratively, there is



a day coming when it will be accomplished in the letter, when the *heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll, and the earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up*. Particular judgments should awaken us to think of the general judgment.

VI. We are here directed to look up to him who is the commander-in-chief of this formidable army, and that is God himself, *v. 11*. It is *his army*; it is *his camp*. He raised it; he gives it commission; he *utters his voice before it*, as the general gives orders to his army what to do and makes a speech to animate the soldiers; it is the Lord that gives the word of command to all these animals, which they exactly observe. Some think that with this cloud of locusts God sent terrible thunder, for that is called, *The voice of the Lord*, and was another of the plagues of Egypt, and this made the heavens and the earth tremble. It is the *day of the Lord* (as it was called, *v. 1*), for in this war we are sure he carries the day; it must needs be his, for *his camp is great and numerous*. Those whom he makes war upon he can, as here, overpower with numbers; and whoever he employs to *execute his word*, as the minister of his justice, is sure to be made *strong and par negotio—equal to what he undertakes*; whom God gives commission to he girds with strength for the executing of that commission. And this makes the *great day of the Lord very terrible* to all those who in that day are to be made the monuments of his justice; for *who can abide it?* None can escape the arrests of God's wrath, can make head against the force of it, or bear up under the weight of it, 1 Sam. vi. 20; Ps. lxxvi. 7.

12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. 14 Who knoweth *if* he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; *even* a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the LORD your God? 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: 16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. 17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let

them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where *is* their God?

We have here an earnest exhortation to repentance, inferred from that desolating judgment described and threatened in the foregoing verses: *Therefore now turn you to the Lord*. 1. "Thus you must answer the end and intention of the judgment; for it was sent for this end, to convince you of your sins, to humble you for them, to reduce you to your right minds and to your allegiance." God brings us into straits, that he may bring us to repentance and so bring us to himself. 2. "Thus you may stay the progress of the judgment. Things are bad with you, but thus you may prevent their growing worse; nay, if you take this course, they will soon grow better." Here is a gracious invitation,

1. To a personal repentance, exercised in the soul, *every family apart, and their wives apart*, Zech. xii. 12. When the judgments of God are abroad, each person is concerned to contribute his *quota* to the common supplications, having contributed to the common guilt. Every one must mend one and mourn for one, and then we should all be mended and all found among God's mourners. Observe,

1. What we are here called to, which will teach us what it is to repent, for it is the same that the Lord our God still requires of us, we having all made work for repentance. (1.) We must be truly humbled for our sins, must be sorry we have by sin offended God, and 'ashamed we have by sin wronged ourselves, both wronged our judgments and wronged our interests. There must be outward expressions of sorrow and shame, *fasting, and weeping, and mourning*; tears for the trouble must be turned into tears for the sin that procured it. But what will the outward expressions of sorrow avail if the inward impressions be not agreeable, and not only accompany them, but be the root and spring of them, and give rise to them? And therefore it follows, *Rend your heart, and not your garments*; not but that, according to the custom of that age, it was proper for them to rend their garments, in token of great grief for their sins and a holy indignation against themselves for their folly; but, "Rest not in the doing of that, as if that were sufficient, but be more in care to accommodate your spirits than to accommodate your dress to a day of fasting and humiliation; nay, rend not your garments at all, unless withal you rend your hearts, for the sign without the thing signified is but a jest and a mockery, and an affront to God." Rending the heart is that which God looks for and requires; that *is*

the broken and contrite heart which he will not despise, Ps. li. 17. When we are greatly grieved in soul for sin, so that it even cuts us to the heart to think how we have dishonoured God and disparaged ourselves by it, when we conceive an aversion to sin, and earnestly desire and endeavour to get clear of the principles of it and never to return to the practice of it, then we rend our hearts for it, and then will God *rend the heavens* and come down to us with mercy. (2.) We must be thoroughly converted to our God, and come home to him when we fall out with sin. *Turn you even to me, saith the Lord* (v. 12), and again (v. 13), *Turn unto the Lord your God*. Our fasting and weeping are worth nothing if we do not with them turn to God as our God. When we are fully convinced that it is our duty and interest to keep in with him, and are heartily sorry we have ever turned the back upon him, and thereupon, by a firm and fixed resolution, make his glory our end, his will our rule, and his favour our felicity, then we *return to the Lord our God*, and this we are all commanded and invited to do, and to do it quickly.

2. What arguments are here used to persuade this people thus to turn to the Lord, and to turn to him *with all their hearts*. When the heart is rent for sin, and rent from it, then it is prepared to turn entirely to God, and to be devoted entirely to him, and he will have it all or none. Now, to bring ourselves to this, let us consider, (1.) We are sure that he is, in general, a good God. We must *turn to the Lord our God*, not only because he has been just and righteous in punishing us for our sins, the fear of which should drive us to him, but because he is *gracious and merciful*, in receiving us upon our repentance, the hope of which should draw us to him. He is gracious and merciful, delights not in the death of sinners, but desires they may turn and live. *He is slow to anger* against those that offend him, but of *great kindness* towards those that desire to please him. These very expressions are used in God's proclamation of his name when he caused his *goodness*, and with it all his glory, to *pass before Moses*, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. *He repents him of the evil*, not that he changes his mind, but, when the sinner's mind is changed, God's way towards him is changed; the sentence is reversed, and the curse of the law is taken off. Note, That is genuine, ingenuous, and evangelical repentance, which arises from a firm belief of the mercy of God, which we have sinned against, and yet are not in despair. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The goodness of God, if it be rightly understood, instead of emboldening us to go on in sin, will be the most powerful inducement to repentance, Ps. cxxx. 4. The act of indemnity brings those to God whom the act of attainder frightened from him. (2.) We have reason to hope that he will, upon our repentance, give us

that good which by sin we have forfeited and deprived ourselves of (v. 14), that he will *return and repent*, that he will not proceed against us as he has done, but will act in favour of us. *Therefore* let us repent of our sins against him, and return to him in a way of duty, because then we may hope that he will repent of his judgments against us and return to us in a way of mercy. Now observe, [1.] The manner of the expectation is very humble and modest: *Who knows if he will?* Some think it is expressed thus doubtfully to check the presumption and security of the people, and to quicken them to a holy carefulness and liveliness in their repentance, as Josh. xxiv. 19. Or, rather, it is expressed doubtfully because it is the removal of a temporal judgment that they here promise themselves, of which we cannot be so confident as we can that, in general, God is gracious and merciful. There is no question at all to be made but that if we truly repent of our sins God will forgive them, and be reconciled to us; but whether he will remove this or the other affliction which we are under may well be questioned, and yet the probability of it should encourage us to repent. Promises of temporal good things are often made with a peradventure. *It may be, you shall be hid*, Zeph. ii. 3. David's sin is pardoned, and yet the child shall die, and, when David prayed for its life, he said, as here, *Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me* in this matter likewise? 2 Sam. xii. 22. The Ninevites repented and reformed upon such a consideration as this, Jonah iii. 9. [2.] The matter of the expectation is very pious. They hope God will return and repent, and *leave a blessing behind him*, not as if he were about to go from them, and they could be content with any blessing in lieu of his presence, but *behind him*, that is, "After he has ceased his controversy with us, he will bestow a blessing upon us;" and what is it? It is a *meat-offering and a drink-offering to the Lord our God*. The fruits of the earth are called a *blessing* (Isa. lxxv. 8) because they depend upon God's blessing and are necessary blessings to us. They had been deprived of these, and that which grieved them most while they were so was that God's altar was deprived of its offerings and God's priests of their maintenance; that therefore which they comfort themselves with the prospect of in their return of plenty is that then there shall be meat-offerings and drink-offerings in abundance brought to God's altar, which they more desired than to see the wonted abundance of meat and drink brought to their own tables. Thus when Hezekiah was in hopes that he should recover of his sickness he asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up*, not to the thrones of judgment, or to the council-board, but *to the house of the Lord?* Isa. xxxviii. 22. Note, The plentiful enjoyment



of God's ordinances in their power and purity is the most valuable instance of a nation's prosperity and the greatest blessing that can be desired. If God give the blessing of the meat-offering and the drink-offering, that will bring along with it other blessings, will sanctify them, sweeten them, and secure them.

II. They are here called to a public national repentance, to be exercised in the solemn assembly, as a national act, for the glory of God and the excitement of one another, and that the neighbouring nations might know and observe what it was that qualified them for God's gracious returns in mercy to them, which they would be the admiring witnesses of. Let us see here, 1. How the congregation must be called together, *v. 15, 16.* The trumpet was blown (*v. 1*), to sound an *alarm of war*; but now it must be blown in order to a treaty of peace. God is willing to show mercy to his people if he do but find them in a frame fit for it; and therefore, Call them together; *sanctify a fast.* By the law many annual feasts were appointed, but only one day in the year was to be observed as a fast, the *day of atonement*, a day to *afflict the soul*; and, if they had kept close to God and their duty, there would have been no occasion to observe any more; but now that they had by sin brought the judgments of God upon them they are often called to fasting. What was said *ch. i. 14* is here repeated: "*Call a solemn assembly; gather the people* (press them to come together upon this errand); *sanctify the congregation*; appoint a time for solemn preparation beforehand and put them in mind to prepare themselves. Let not the greatest be excused, but *assemble the elders*, the judges and magistrates. Let not the meanest be passed by, but *gather the children, and those that suck the breasts.*" It is good to bring little children, as soon as they are capable of understanding any thing, to religious assemblies, that they may be trained up betimes in the way wherein they should go; but these were brought even when they were at the breast and were kept fasting, that by their cries for the breast the hearts of the parents might be moved to repent of sin, which God might justly so visit upon their children that the *tongue of the sucking child* might *cleave to the roof of his mouth* (*Lam. iv. 4*), and that on them God might have compassion, as he had on the infants of Nineveh, *Jonah iv. 11.* New-married people must not be exempted: *Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet*; let them not take state upon them as usual, not put on their ornaments, nor indulge themselves in mirth, but address themselves to the duties of the public fast with as much gravity and sadness as any of their neighbours. Note, Private joys must always give way to public sorrows, both those for affliction and those for sin.

2. How the work of the day must be carried on, *v. 17.* (1.) The priests, *the Lord's ministers*, must preside in the congregation, and be God's mouth to the people, and theirs to God; who should stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God but those whose business it was to make intercession upon ordinary occasions? (2.) They must officiate *between the porch and the altar.* There they used to attend about the sacrifices, and therefore now that they have no sacrifices to offer, or next to none, there they must offer up spiritual sacrifices. There the people must see them weeping and wrestling, like their father Jacob, and be helped into the same devout frame. Ministers must themselves be affected with those things wherewith they desire to affect others. It was *between the porch and the altar* that Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was put to death for his faithfulness; that precious blood God would require at their hands, and therefore, to turn away the judgment threatened for it, there they must weep. (3.) They must pray. Words are here put into their mouths, which they might in their prayers enlarge upon. Their petition must be, *Spare thy people, O Lord!* God's people, when they are in distress, can expect no relief against God's justice but what comes from his mercy. They cannot say, *Lord, right us*, but, *Lord, spare us.* We deserve the correction; we need it; but, *Lord, mitigate it.* The sinner's supplication is, *Spare us, good Lord.* Their plea must be taken from the relation wherein they stand to God ("*They are thy people, and thy heritage*, therefore have compassion on them"), but especially from the concern of God's glory in their trouble—"Lord, *give not thy heritage to reproach*, to the reproach of famine; let not the land of Canaan, that has so long been celebrated as the glory of all lands, now be made the scorn of all lands; let not *the heathen rule over them*, as they will easily do when thy heritage is thus impoverished and disabled to subsist. Let not the heathen make them a *proverb*, or a *by-word*" (so some read it); "let it never be said, *As poor and beggarly as an Israelite.*" Note, The maintaining of the credit of the nation among its neighbours is a blessing to be desired and prayed for by all that wish well to it. But that reproach of the church is especially to be dreaded and deprecated which reflects upon God: "Let them not *say among the people, Where is their God*—that God who has promised to help them, whom they have boasted so much of and put such a confidence in?" If God's heritage be destroyed, the neighbours will say, "God was either weak and could not relieve them or unkind and would not." God thus triumphs over the pretended deities. *Dent. xxxii. 37, Where are now their gods in whom they trusted?* And Sennacherib thus triumphs over them. *Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad?* But it must by no means be

suffered that they should say of Israel, *Where is their God?* For we are sure that our God is in the heavens (Ps. cxv. 2, 3), is in his temple, Ps. xi. 4.

18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. 19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: 20 But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things. 21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. 22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength. 23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. 24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. 25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you. 26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. 27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

See how ready God is to succour and relieve his people, how he *wants to be gracious*; as soon as ever they humble themselves under his hand, and pray, and seek his face, he immediately meets them with his favours. They prayed that God would *spare them*, and see here with what *good words and comfortable words* he answered them; for God's promises are real answers to the prayers of

faith, because with him saying and doing are not two things. Now observe,

I. Whence this mercy promised shall take rise (v. 18): God will be *jealous for his land* and *pity his people*. He will have an eye, 1. To his own honour, and the reputation of his covenant with Israel, by which he had conveyed to them that good land and had given in the value of it very high; now he will not suffer it to be despised nor disparaged, but will be jealous for the credit of his land, and the inhabitants of it, who had been praised as a happy people and therefore must not lie open to reproach as a miserable people. 2. To their distress: He will *pity his people*, and, in pity to them, he will restore them their forfeited comforts. God's compassion is a great encouragement to those that come humbly to him as penitents and as petitioners.

II. What his mercy shall be, in several instances:—1. The destroying army shall be dispersed and defeated (v. 20): “*I will remove far off from you the northern army*, that army of locusts and caterpillars that invaded you from the north, brought in upon the wings of a north wind, an army which you could put no stop to the progress of; but, when you have made your peace with God, he will ease you of these soldiers that are quartered upon you and will *drive them into a land barren and desolate*, into that vast howling wilderness that Israel wandered in, where, after having surfeited upon the plenty of Canaan, they shall perish for want of sustenance. Those that have their *face to the east sea* (the Dead Sea, which lay east of Judea) shall perish in that, and the rear of the army shall be lost in the Great Sea,” called here the *utmost sea*. They had made the land barren and desolate, and now God will cast them into a land barren and desolate. Thus those whom God employs for the correction of his people come afterwards to be themselves reckoned with; and the rod is thrown into the fire. Nothing shall remain of these swarms of insects but the ill savour of them. When Egypt was eased of the plague of locusts they were carried away to the Red Sea, Exod. x. 19. Note, When an affliction has done its work it shall be removed in mercy, as the locusts of Canaan were from a penitent people, not as the locusts of Egypt were removed, in wrath, from an impenitent prince, only to make room for another plague. Many interpreters, by this northern army, understand that of Sennacherib, which was dispersed when God by it had *accomplished his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem*, Isa. x. 12. This enemy shall be driven away, because *he has done great things*, has done a great deal of mischief, and has *magnified* to do it, has done it in the pride of his heart; therefore it follows (v. 21), *The Lord will do great things for his people*, as the enemy has done great things against them, to convince them



that wherein they deal proudly he is, and will be, above them, that, what great things soever they did, they did no more than God commissioned them to do; and as, when he said to them, Go, they went, so, when he said to them, Come, they came, to show that they were *soldiers under him*. 2. The destroyed land shall be watered and made fruitful. When the army is scattered, yet what shall we do if the desolation they have made continue? It is therefore promised (v. 22) that *the pastures of the wilderness*, the pastures which the locusts had left as bare as the wilderness, shall again *spring* and the *trees shall again bear their fruit*, particularly the *fig-tree* and the *vine*. But, when we see how the country is wasted, we are tempted to say, *Can these dry bones live? If the Lord should make windows in heaven*, it cannot be; but it shall be, for (v. 23) *the Lord has given* and will give you *the former rain* and the *latter rain*, and, if he give them in mercy, he will give them moderately, so that the rain shall not turn into a judgment, and he will give them in due season, the *latter rain in the first month*, when it was wanted and expected. It would make it comfortable to them to see it coming from the hand of God, and ordered by his wisdom, for then we are sure it is well ordered. *He has given you a teacher of righteousness* (so the margin reads it, for the same word that signifies the *rain* signifies a *teacher*, and that which we translate *moderately* is according to *righteousness*), and this *teacher of righteousness*, says one of the rabbins, is the King Messiah, and of him many others understand this; for he is a *teacher come from God*, and he shows us the way of *righteousness*. But others understand it of any prophet that *instructs unto righteousness*, and some of Hezekiah particularly, others of Isaiah. Note, It is a good sign that God has mercy in store for a people when he sends them teachers of righteousness, pastors after his own heart. 3. All their losses shall be repaired (v. 25): "*I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten*; you shall be comforted according to the time that you have been afflicted, and shall have years of plenty to balance the years of famine." Thus does it *repent the Lord concerning his servants*, when they repent, and, to show how perfectly he is reconciled to them, he makes good the damage they have sustained by his judgments, and, like the jailer, *washes their stripes*. Though, in justice, he distrained upon them, and did them no wrong, yet, in compassion, he makes restitution; as the father of the prodigal, upon his return, made up all he had lost by his sin and folly, and took him into his family, as in his former estate. The locusts and caterpillars are here called *God's great army which he sent among them*, and he will repair what they had devoured because they were his army. 4. They shall have great abundance of all good things.

The earth shall yield her increase, and they shall enjoy it. Look into the stores where they lay up, and you shall find *the floors full of wheat, and the fats overflowing with wine and oil* (v. 24), whereas, in the day of their distress, the *wine and oil languished* and the *barns were broken down*, ch. i. 10, 17. Look upon their tables, where they lay out what they have laid up, and you shall find that they *eat in plenty and are satisfied*, v. 26. They do not eat to excess, nor are surfeited; we hope the *drunkards* are cured by the late affliction of their inordinate love of wine and strong drink, for, though they were brought in howling for their scarcity (ch. i. 5), they are not brought in again here singing for the plenty of it; but now all shall have enough, and shall know when they have enough, for God will make their food nourishing and give to them to be content with it.

These are the mercies promised, and in these *God does great things* (v. 21). *He deals wondrously with his people*, v. 26. Herein he glorifies his power, and shows that he can relieve his people though their distress be ever so great, and glorifies his goodness, that he will do it upon their repentance though their provocations were ever so great. Note, When God deals graciously with poor sinners that return to him it must be acknowledged that he deals wondrously and does great things. Some expositors understand these promises figuratively, as pointing at gospel-grace, and having their accomplishment in the abundant comforts that are treasured up for believers in the covenant of grace and the satisfaction of soul they have therein. When God sends us his promises to be the matter of our comfort, his graces to be the grounds of it, and his Spirit to be the author of it, we may well own that he has sent us (according to his promise here, v. 19) *corn, and wine, and oil*, or that which is unspeakably better, and we have reason to be satisfied therewith.

III. What use shall be made of these returns of God's mercy to them and the good account they shall turn to.

1. God shall have the glory thereof, for they shall *rejoice in the Lord their God* (v. 23), and what is the matter of their rejoicing shall be the matter of their thanksgiving; they shall *praise the name of the Lord their God* (v. 26) and not praise their idols, nor call their corn and wine the *rewards that their lovers had given them*. Note, The plenty of our creature-comforts is a mercy indeed to us when by them our hearts are enlarged in love and thankfulness to God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy, though we serve him but poorly. When God restores to us plenty after we have known scarcity, as it is doubly pleasant to us, so it should make us the more thankful to God. When Israel comes out of a wilderness into a Canaan, and there eats and is full, surely he will then *bless the Lord*, with a very sensible pleasure,



for *that good land which he has given him*, Deut. viii. 10.

2. They shall have the credit, and comfort, and spiritual benefit, thereof. When God gives them plenty again, and gives them to be satisfied with it, (1.) Their reputation shall be retrieved; they and their God shall be no more reflected upon as unfaithful to one another when they have returned to him in a way of duty and he to them in a way of mercy (v. 19): "*I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen*, that triumphed in your calamities and insulted over you; and v. 26, 27, "*My people shall never be ashamed*, as they have been, of their good land which they used to boast of, but shall again and ever have the same occasion to boast of it." Note, It redounds much to the honour of God when he does that which saves the honour of his people; and those that are his people indeed, though they may be for a time, shall not be always, a *reproach among the heathen*; if we be rightly ashamed of our sins against God, we shall never be ashamed of our glorying in God. (2.) Their joys shall be revived (v. 23): *Be glad and rejoice, O land!* and all the inhabitants of it. Times of plenty are commonly times of joy; yet the favour of God *puts gladness into the heart* more than those have whose *corn, and wine, and oil increase*. But especially *be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God*, v. 23. They *mourned in Zion* (v. 15), and therefore there in a particular manner they shall rejoice; for those that sow in penitential tears shall certainly reap in thankful joys. The children of Zion, who led the rest in fasting, must lead the rest in rejoicing. But observe, They shall *rejoice in the Lord their God*, not so much in the good things themselves that are given them as in the good hand that gives them and in the return of his favour to them, as theirs in covenant, which these good things are the tokens and pledges of. The *joy of harvest* and the joy of a feast must both terminate in God, whose love we should taste in all the gifts of his bounty, that we may make him our chief joy, as he is our chief good, and the fountain of all good to us. (3.) Their faith in God shall be confirmed and increased. When temporal mercies are made by the grace of God to be of spiritual advantage to us, and plenty for the body is so far from being an enemy (as with many it proves) that it becomes a friend to the prosperity of the soul, then they are mercies indeed to us. This is promised here (v. 27): *You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, the Holy One in the midst of thee* (Hos. xi. 9), and that *I am the Lord your God, and none else*. As it proves that the Lord is God, and there is none other, because he *wounds and he heals, he forms light and darkness, he does good and evil* (Isa. xlv. 7; Deut. xxxii. 39), so it proves him to be *God of Israel*, a God in covenant with his people and a

father to them, that as a father he both corrects them when they offend and comforts them when they repent. It was the burden of the threatenings in Ezekiel's prophecy, *Such and such evils I will bring upon you, and you shall know that I am the Lord*; and the same is here made the crown of the promises: *You shall eat, and be satisfied*, and rejoice, and thus *you shall know that I am the Lord*. Note, We should labour to grow in our acquaintance with God by all providences, both merciful and afflictive. When God gives to his people plenty, and peace, and joy, upon their return to him, he thereby gives them to understand that he is pleased with their repentance, that he has pardoned their sins, and that he is theirs as much as ever—that they are taken into the same covenant with him, for he is the Lord their God, and into the same communion, for he is in the midst of them, *nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for*, and, as the sun in the centre of the worlds, so in the midst of them as to diffuse his benign influences to all the parts of his land.

3. Even the inferior creatures shall share therein and be made easy thereby: *Fear not, O land! v. 21. Be not afraid, you beasts of the field, v. 22*. They had suffered for the sin of man, and for God's quarrel with him; and now they shall fare the better for man's repentance and God's reconciliation to him. Nay, the beasts were said to *cry unto God* (ch. i. 20); and now that cry is answered, and they are directed not to *be afraid*, for they shall have plenty of all that which their nature craves. God, in sparing Nineveh, had an eye to the cattle (Jonah iv. 11), for the cattle had fasted, ch. iii. 8. This may lead us to think of the restitution of all things, when the *creature*, that is now made *subject to vanity and groans* under it, shall be brought, though not into the glorious joy, yet into the *glorious liberty, of the children of God*, Rom. viii. 21.

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, *that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh*; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. 30 And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. 32 And it shall come to pass, *that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord* shall be delivered: for in mount Zion



and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

The promises of corn, and wine, and oil, in the foregoing verses, would be very acceptable to a wasted country; but here we are taught that we must not rest in those things. God has reserved some better things for us, and these verses have reference to those better things, both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory, with the happiness of true believers in both. We are here told,

I. How the kingdom of grace shall be introduced by a plentiful *effusion of the Spirit*, v. 28, 29. We are not at a loss about the meaning of this promise, nor in doubt what it refers to and wherein it had its accomplishment, for the apostle Peter has given us an infallible explication and application of it, assuring us that when the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 1, &c.), that was the very thing *which was spoken of here by the prophet Joel*, v. 16, 17. That was the gift of the Spirit, which, according to this prediction, was *to come*, and we are not to look for any other, any more than for another accomplishment of the promise of the Messiah. Now, 1. The blessing itself here promised is the *pouring out of the Spirit of God*, his gifts, graces, and comforts, which the blessed Spirit is the author of. We often read in the Old Testament of the Spirit of the Lord coming by drops, as it were, upon the judges and prophets whom God raised up for extraordinary services; but now the Spirit shall be poured out plentifully in a full stream, as was promised with an eye to gospel-times, Isa. xlv. 3. *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed.* 2. The time fixed for this is *afterwards*; after the fulfilling of the foregoing promises this shall be fulfilled. St. Peter expounds this of *the last days*, the days of the Messiah, by whom the world was to have its last revelation of the divine will and grace in the last days of the Jewish church, a little before its dissolution. 3. The extent of this blessing, in respect of the persons on whom it shall be bestowed. The Spirit shall be *poured out upon all flesh*, not as witherto upon Jews only, but upon Gentiles also; for in Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, Rom. x. 11, 12. Hitherto divine revelation was confined to the seed of Abraham, none but those of the land of Israel had the Spirit of prophecy; but, in the last days, *all flesh shall see the glory of God* (Isa. xl. 5) and shall come to *worship before him*, Isa. lxvi. 23. The Jews understand it of all flesh in the land of Israel, and Peter himself did not fully understand it as speaking of the Gentiles till he saw it accomplished in the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Cornelius and his friends, who were Gentiles (Acts x. 44, 45), which was

but a continuation of the same gift which was bestowed on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit shall be poured out *upon all flesh*, that is, upon all those whose hearts are made hearts of flesh, soft and tender, and so prepared to receive the impressions and influences of the Holy Ghost. *Upon all flesh*, that is, upon some of all sorts of men; the gifts of the Spirit shall not be so sparing, or so much confined, as they have been, but shall be more general and diffusive of themselves. (1.) The Spirit shall be poured out upon some of each sex. Not *your sons* only, but *your daughters*, shall prophesy: we read of four sisters in one family that were prophetesses, Acts xxi. 9. Not the parents only, but the children, shall be filled with the Spirit, which intimates the continuance of this gift for some ages successively in the church. (2.) Upon some of each age: "*Your old men*, who are past their vigour and whose spirits begin to decay, *your young men*, who have yet but little acquaintance with and experience of divine things, shall yet *dream dreams* and *see visions*; God will reveal himself by dreams and visions both to young and old. (3.) Upon those of the meanest rank and condition, even *upon the servants and the handmaids*. The Jewish doctors say, *Prophecy does not reside on any* but such as are *wise, valiant, and rich*, not upon the soul of a *poor man*, or a man *in sorrow*. But in Christ Jesus there is *neither bond nor free*, Gal. iii. 28. There were many that *were called being servants* (1 Cor. vii. 21), but that was no obstruction to their receiving the Holy Ghost. (4.) The effect of this blessing: *They shall prophesy*; they shall receive new discoveries of divine things, and that not for their own use only, but for the benefit of the church. They shall interpret scripture, and speak of things secret, distant, and future, which by the utmost sagacities of reason, and their natural powers, they could not have any insight into nor foresight of. By these extraordinary gifts the Christian church was first founded and set up, and the scriptures were written, and the ministry settled, by which, with the ordinary operations and influences of the Spirit, it was to be afterwards maintained and kept up.

II. How the kingdom of glory shall be introduced by the universal change of nature, v. 30, 31. The pouring out of the Spirit will be very comfortable to the righteous; but let the unrighteous hear this, and tremble. There is a *great and terrible day of the Lord* coming, which shall be ushered in with *wonders in heaven and earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke*, the turning of *the sun into darkness and the moon into blood*. This is to have its full accomplishment (as the learned Dr. Pocock thinks) in the day of judgment, at the end of time, before which these signs will be performed in the letter of them, yet so that it was accomplished in part in the death of Christ

(which is called the *judgment of this world*, when the earth quaked and the sun was darkened, and a *great and terrible day* it was), and more fully in the destruction of Jerusalem, which was a type and figure of the general judgment, and before which there were many amazing prodigies, besides the convulsions of states and kingdoms prophesied of under the figurative expressions of turning *the sun into darkness and the moon into blood*, and the *Wars and rumours of wars*, and *distress of nations*, which our Saviour spoke of as the *beginning of these sorrows*, Matt. xxiv. 6, 7. But before the last judgment there will be *wonders indeed in heaven and earth*, the dissolution of both, without a metaphor. The judgments of God upon a sinful world, and the frequent destruction of wicked kingdoms by fire and sword, are prefaces to and presages of the judgment of the world in the last day. Those on whom the Spirit is poured out shall foresee and foretell that *great and terrible day of the Lord*, and expound the *wonders in heaven and earth* that go before it; for, as to his first coming, so to his second, all the prophets did and do bear witness, Rev. x. 7.

III. The safety and happiness of all true believers both in the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, v. 32. This speaks of particular persons, for to them the New Testament has more respect, and less to kingdoms and nations, than the Old. Now observe here, 1. That there is a salvation wrought out. Though the day of the Lord will be great and terrible, yet in *Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance* from the terror of it. It is the day of the Lord, the day of his judgment, who knows how to separate between the precious and the vile. In the everlasting gospel, which *went from Zion*, in the church of the first-born typified by Mount Zion, and which is the Jerusalem that is from above, there is *deliverance*; a way of escaping the *wrath to come* is found out and laid open. Christ is himself not only the *Saviour*, but the *salvation*; he is so *to the ends of the earth*. This deliverance, laid up for us in the covenant of grace, is in performance of the promises made to the fathers. *There shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said*. See Luke i. 72. Note, This is ground of comfort and hope to sinners, that, whatever danger there is in their case, there is also deliverance, deliverance for them, if it be not their own fault. And, if we would share in this deliverance, we must ourselves apply to the gospel-Zion, to God's Jerusalem. 2. That there is a remnant interested in this salvation, and for whom the deliverance is wrought. It is *in that remnant* (that is, among them) that the deliverance is, or in their souls and spirits; there are the earnest and evidences of it. *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. They are called a *remnant*, because they are but a few in comparison with the multitudes that are left to perish;

a little remnant but a chosen one, a *remnant according to the election of grace*. And here we are told who they are that shall be delivered in the great day. (1.) Those that sincerely call upon God: *Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord*, whether Jew or Gentile (for the apostle so expounds it, Rom. x. 13, where he lays this down as the great rule of the gospel by which we must all be judged), *shall be delivered*. This calling on God supposes knowledge of him, faith in him, desire towards him, dependence on him, and, as an evidence of the sincerity of all this, a conscientious obedience to him; for, without that, crying *Lord, Lord*, will not stand us in any stead. Note, It is the praying remnant that shall be the saved remnant. And it will aggravate the ruin of those who perish that they might have been saved on such easy terms. (2.) Those that are effectually called to God. The deliverance is sure to the *remnant whom the Lord shall call*, not only with the common call of the gospel, with which many are called that are not chosen, but with a special call into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, whom the *Lord predestinates*, or *prepares*, so the Chaldee. St. Peter borrows this phrase, Acts ii. 39. Note, Those only shall be delivered in the great day that are now effectually called from sin to God, from self to Christ, from things below to things above.

## CHAP. III.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we had a gracious promise of deliverance in Mount Zion and Jerusalem; now this whole chapter is a comment upon that promise, showing what that deliverance shall be, how it shall be wrought by the destruction of the church's enemies, and how it shall be perfected in the everlasting rest and joy of the church. This was in part accomplished in the deliverance of Jerusalem from the attempt that Sennacherib made upon it in Hezekiah's time, and afterwards in the return of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, and other deliverances wrought for the Jewish church between that and Christ's coming. But it has a further reference, to the great redemption wrought out for us by Jesus Christ, and the destruction of our spiritual enemies and all their agents, and will have its full accomplishment in the judgment of the great day. Here is a prediction, I. Of God's reckoning with the enemies of his people for all the injuries and indignities that they had done them, and returning them upon their own head, ver. 1-8. II. Of God's judging all nations when the measure of their iniquity is full, and appearing publicly, to the everlasting confusion of all impenitent sinners and the everlasting comfort of all his faithful servants, ver. 9-17. III. Of the provision God has made for the refreshment of his people, for their safety and purity, when their enemies shall be made desolate, ver. 18-21. These promises were not of private interpretation only, but were written for our learning, "that we, through patience and comfort of this scripture, might have hope."

**F**OR, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. 3 And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink. 4 Yea, and what have ye to



do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head; 5 Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things: 6 The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border. 7 Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: 8 And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it.

We have often heard of the *year of the redeemed*, and the *year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*; now here we have a description of the transactions of that year, and a prophecy of what shall be done when it comes, whenever it comes, for it comes often, and at the end of time it will come once for all.

I. It shall be the *year of the redeemed*, for God will bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, v. 1. Though the bondage of God's people may be grievous and very long, yet it shall not be everlasting. That in Egypt ended at length in their deliverance into the glorious liberty of the children of God. *Let my son go, that he may serve me.* That in Babylon shall likewise end well. And the Lord Jesus will provide for the effectual redemption of poor enslaved souls from under the dominion of sin and Satan, and will proclaim that *acceptable year*, the year of jubilee, the release of debts and servants, and the *opening of the prison to those that were bound*. There is a day, there is a time, fixed for the *bringing again of the captivity of God's children*, for the redeeming of them from the *power of the grave*; and it shall be the *last day* and the end of all time.

II. It shall be the *year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*. Though God may suffer the enemies of his people to prevail against them very far and for a long time, yet he will call them to an account for it, and will lead captivity captive (Ps. lxxviii. 18), will lead those captive that led his people captive, Rev. xiii. 10. Observe,

1. Who those are that shall be reckoned with—all nations, v. 2. This intimates, (1.) That all the nations had made themselves liable to the judgment of God for wrong done to his people. Persecution is the reigning crying sin of the world; that *lying in*

wickedness itself is set against godliness. The enmity that is in the old serpent, *the god of this world*, against the seed of the woman, appears more or less in the *children of this world*. *Marvel not if the world hate you.* (2.) That, whatsoever nation injured God's nation, they should not go unpunished; for he that touches the Israel of God shall be made to know that he touches the apple of his eye. Jerusalem will be a *burdensome stone to all people*, Zech. xii. 3. But the neighbouring nations shall be particularly reckoned with—Tyre, and Sidon, and all the coasts of Palestine, or the Philistines, who have been troublesome neighbours to the Israel of God, v. 4. When the more remote and potent nations that laid Israel waste are reckoned with the impotent malice of those that lay near them, and *helped forward the affliction*, (Zech. i. 15), and made a hand of it (Ezek. xxvi. 2), shall not be passed by. Note, Little persecutors shall be called to an account as well as great ones; and, though they could not do much mischief, shall be reckoned with according to the *wickedness of their endeavours* and the mischief they would have done.

2. The sitting of this court for judgment. They shall all be *gathered* (v. 2), that those who have combined together against God's people, *with one consent* (Ps. lxxviii. 5), may together receive their doom. They shall be *brought down into the valley of Jehoshaphat*, which lay near Jerusalem, and there God will *plead with them*, (1.) Because it is fit that criminals should be tried in the same country where they did the fact. (2.) For their greater confusion, when they shall see that Jerusalem which they have so long endeavoured and hoped for the ruin of, in spite of all their rage, made a *praise in the earth*. (3.) For the greater comfort and honour of God's Jerusalem, which shall see God pleading their cause. (4.) Then shall be re-acted what God did for Jehoshaphat when he gave him victory over those that invaded him, and furnished him and his people with matter of joy and praise, in the *valley of Berachah*. See 2 Chron. xx. 26. (5.) It was in this valley of Jehoshaphat (as Dr. Lightfoot suggests) that Sennacherib's army, or part of it, lay, when it was destroyed by an angel. They came together to ruin Jerusalem, but God brought them together for their own ruin, *as sheaves into the floor*, Mic. iv. 12.

3. The plaintiff called, on whose behalf this prosecution is set on foot; it is *for my people*, and *for my heritage Israel*. It is their cause that God will now plead with jealousy. Note, God's people are his *heritage*, his *peculiar*, his *portion*, his *treasure*, above all people, Exod. xix. 5; Deut. xxxii. 9. They are his demesne, and therefore he has a good action against those that trespass upon them.

4. The charge exhibited against them, which is very particular. Many affronts they had put upon God by their idolatries,



but that for which God has a quarrel with them is the affront they have put upon his people and upon the vessels of his sanctuary.

(1.) They had been very abusive to the people of Israel, had scattered them among the nations and forced them to seek for shelter where they could find a place, or carried them captive into their respective countries and there industriously dispersed them, for fear of their incorporating for their common safety. They parted their land, and took every one his share of it as their own; nay, they have cast lots for my people, and sold them. When they had taken them prisoners, [1.] They made a jest of them, made a scorn of them as of no value. They would not release them and yet thought them not worth the keeping; they made nothing of playing them away at dice. Or they made a dividend of the prisoners by lot, as the soldiers did of Christ's garments. [2.] They made a gain of them. When they had them they sold them, yet with so much contempt that they did not increase their wealth by their price, but sold them for their pleasure rather than their profit; they gave a boy taken in war for the hire of a harlot, and a girl for so many bottles of wine as would serve them for one sitting, a goodly price at which they valued them, and goodly preferment for a son and daughter of Israel to be a slave and a drudge in a tavern or a brothel. Observe, here, how that which is got by one sin is commonly spent upon another. The spoil which these enemies of the Jews gathered by injustice and violence they scattered and threw away in drinking and whoring; such is frequently the character, and such the conversation, of the enemies and persecutors of the people of God. The Tyrians and Philistines, when they seized any of the children of Judah and Jerusalem, either took them prisoners in war or kidnapped them, they sold them to the Grecians (with whom the men of Tyre traded in the persons of men, Ezek. xxvii. 13), that they might remove them far from their own border, v. 6. It was a great reproach to Israel, God's first-born, his free-born, to be thus bought and sold among the heathen.

(2.) They had unjustly seized God's silver and gold (v. 5), by which some understand the wealth of Israel. The silver and gold which God's people had he calls his, because they had received it from him and devoted it to him; and whosoever robbed them God took it as if they had robbed him and would make reprisals accordingly. Those who take away the estates of good men for well-doing will be found guilty of sacrilege; they take God's silver and gold. But it seems rather to be meant of the vessels and treasures of the temple, which God here calls his goodly pleasant things, precious and desirable to him and all that are his. These they carried into their temples as trophies of their victory over God's Israel, thinking that therein they

triumphed over Israel's God, nay, and that their idols triumphed over him. Thus the ark was put in Dagon's temple. Thus they did unjustly. "What have you to do with me (v. 4), with my people; what wrong have they done you? What provocation have they given you? You had nothing to do with them, and yet you do all this against them. Devices are devised against the quiet in the land, and those offended and harmed that are harmless and inoffensive: Will you render me a recompence?" Can they pretend that either God or his people have done them any injury, for which they may justify themselves by the law of retaliation in doing them these mischiefs? No; they have no colour for it. Note, It is no new thing for those who have been very civil and obliging to their neighbours to find them very unkind and unneighbourly and for those who do no injuries to suffer many.

5. The sentence passed upon them. In general (v. 4), "If you recompence me, if you pretend a quarrel with me, if you provoke me thus to jealousy, if you touch the apple of my eye, I will swiftly and speedily return your recompence upon your own head." Those that contend with God will find themselves unable to make their part good with him. He will recompence them suddenly, when they little think of it, and have not time to prevent it; if he take them to task, he will soon effect their ruin. Particularly, it is threatened, (1.) That they shall not gain their end in the mischief they designed against God's people. They thought to remove them so far from their border that they should never return to it again, v. 6. But (says God) "I will raise them out of the place whither you have sold them, and they shall not, as you intended, be buried alive there." Men's selling the people of God will not deprive him of his property in them. (2.) That they shall be paid in their own coin, as Adonibezek was (v. 8): "I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the children of Judah; you shall lie as much at their mercy as they have been at yours," Isa. lx. 14. Thus the Jews had rule over those that hated them, Esther ix. 1. And then they shall justly be sold to the Sabeans, to a people far off. This (some think) had its accomplishment in the victories obtained by the Maccabees over the enemies of the Jews; others think it looks as far forward as the last day, when the upright shall have dominion (Ps. xlix. 14) and the saints shall judge the world. It is certain that none ever hardened his heart against God, or his church, and prospered long; no, not Pharaoh himself, for the Lord has spoken it, for the comfort of all his suffering servants, that vengeance is his and he will repay.

9 Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war



draw near; let them come up: 10 Beat your plough-shares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears: let the weak say, *I am strong*. 11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. 12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. 13 Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. 16 The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. 17 So shall ye know that *I am* the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.

What the psalmist had long before ordered to be *said among the heathen* (Ps. xvi. 10) the prophet here will have in like manner to be published to all nations, *That the Lord reigns*, and that *he comes, he comes to judge the earth*, as he had long been judging in the earth. The notice here given of God's judging the nations may have reference to the destruction of Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, and to the Antichrist especially, and all the proud enemies of the Christian church; but some of the best interpreters, ancient and modern (particularly the learned Dr. Pocock), think the scope of these verses is to set forth the day of the last judgment under the similitude of God's making war upon the enemies of his kingdom, and his gathering in the harvest of the earth, both which similitudes we find used in the Revelation, *ch. xix. 11; xiv. 18*. Here we have,

I. A challenge given to all the enemies of God's kingdom to do their worst. To signify to them that God is preparing war against them, they are called upon to prepare war against him, *v. 9—11*. When the

hour of God's judgment shall come effectual methods shall be taken to gather all nations *to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*, Rev. xvi. 14; xx. 8. It seems to be here spoken ironically: "*Proclaim you this among the Gentiles*; let all the forces of the nations be summoned to join in confederacy against God and his people." It is like that, Isa. viii. 9, "*Associate yourselves, O you people! and gird yourselves, but you shall be broken to pieces. Prepare war*; muster up all your strength; *wake up the mighty men*; call them into your service; excite them to vigilance and resolution; *let all the men of war draw near. Let them come and enter the lists with Omnipotence if they dare*; let them not complain for want of weapons, but let them *beat their ploughshares into swords and their pruning-hooks into spears*. Let them resolve, if they will, never to return to their husbandry again, but either to conquer or die; let none plead unfitness to bear arms, but *let the weak say, I am strong* and will venture into the field of battle." Thus does a God of almighty power bid defiance to all the opposition of the powers of darkness; let the heathen rage, and the *kings of the earth take counsel together, against the Lord and his Christ*; let them *assemble, and come, and gather themselves together*; but he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them, and, while he thus calls them, he has them in derision, Ps. ii. 1, 4. The heathen must be wakened, must be raised from the dead, that they may *come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat*, to receive their doom (*v. 12*), may come up out of their graves, come up *into the air*, to meet the Lord there. Jehoshaphat signifies the *judgment of the Lord*. Let them come to the place of God's judgment, which perhaps is the chief reason for the using of this name here, but it is put together as a proper name for the sake of allusions to the place so called, which we observed before; let them come thither where God will *sit to judge the heathen*, to that *throne of glory* before which shall be *gathered all nations* (Matt. xxv. 32), for before the judgment-seat of Christ *we must all appear*. The challenge (*v. 9*) is turned into a summons, *v. 12*. It is not only, *Come if you dare*, but, *You shall come* whether you will or no, for there is no escaping the judgments of God.

II. A charge given to the ministers of God's justice to appear and act against these daring enemies of his kingdom among men: And therefore *cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord!* *v. 11*. When they bring their forces into the field, let God bring his, let the archangel's trumpet sound a charge, to call together his *mighty ones*, that is, his angels. Perhaps it is with reference to this that Christ's coming from heaven at the last day is said to be *with his mighty angels*, 2 Thess. i. 7. These are the *hosts of the Lord*, that shall fight his battles when he shall put down all opposing rule, principality, and

power, when he shall *judge among the heathen*, Ps. cx. 6. Some think these words (v. 9, 10), *Prepare war, wake up the mighty men*, are not a challenge to the enemies' hosts, but a charge to God's hosts; let them *draw near, and come up*. When God's cause is to be pleaded, either by the law or by the sword, he has those ready that shall plead it effectually, witnesses ready to appear for him in the court of judgment, soldiers ready to appear for him in the field of battle. They shall *beat ploughshares into swords*, if need be. However, it is plain that to them the charge is given (v. 13), *Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe*; that is, *their wickedness is great*, the measure of it is full, and they are ripe for ruin. Our Saviour has expounded this, Matt. xiii. 39. *The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels*. And they are commanded to *thrust in their sickle, their sharp sickle*, and gather in both the *harvest and the vintage*, Rev. xiv. 15, 18. Note, The greatness of men's wickedness makes them ripe for God's judgment.

III. The vast appearance that shall be in that great and solemn day (v. 14): *Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision*, the same which before was called the *valley of Jehoshaphat*, or of the *judgment of the Lord*, for the day of the Lord is near in that valley. Note, 1. The judgment-day, that day of the Lord, has all along been looked upon, and spoken of, as *nigh at hand*. Enoch said, *Behold, the Lord comes*, as if the Judge were then standing before the door, because it is certain that that day will come and will come according to the appointment, and a *thousand years with God are but as one day*; things are ripening apace for it; we ought always to be ready for it, because our judgment is at hand. 2. The day of judgment will be the *day of decision*, when every man's eternal state will be determined, and the controversy that has been long depending between the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan shall be finally decided, and an end put to the struggle. *The valley of the distribution of judgment* (so the Chaldee), when *every man shall receive according to the things done in the body*. *The valley of threshing* (so the margin), carrying on the metaphor of the harvest, v. 13. The proud enemies of God's people will then be crushed and broken to pieces, and made as the *dust of the summer threshing-floors*. 3. Innumerable multitudes will be gathered together to receive their final doom in that day, as in the destruction of Gog we read of the valley of *Hamon-Gog*, and the city of *Hamonah* (Ezek. xxxix. 15, 16), both signifying the *multitude* of the vanquished enemies; it is the word here used, *Hamonim*, *Hamonim*, expressed by way of admiration—O what vast multitudes of sinners will divine justice be glorified in the ruin of at that day! *A multitude of living* (says one of the rabbins) *and a multitude of*

*dead*, for Christ shall come to *judge both the quick and the dead*.

IV. The amazing change that shall then be made in the kingdom of nature (v. 15): *The sun and moon shall be darkened*, as before, ch. ii. 31. Their glory and lustre shall be eclipsed by the far greater brightness of that glory in which the Judge shall then appear. Nay, they shall themselves be set aside in the dissolution of all things; for damned sinners in hell shall not be allowed their light, being cast into utter darkness, and glorified saints in heaven shall not need their light, for God himself will be *their everlasting light*, Isa. lx. 19. Those that fall under the wrath of God in that day of wrath shall be cut off from all comfort and joy, signified by the darkening not only of sun and moon, but of the stars also.

V. The different impressions which that day will make upon the children of this world and the children of God, according as it will be to them. 1. To the wicked it will be a terrible day. *The Lord* shall then speak *from Zion and Jerusalem*, from the throne of his glory, from heaven, where he manifests himself in a peculiar manner, as sometimes he had done in the *glorious high throne of his sanctuary*, which yet was but a faint resemblance of the glory of that day. He shall speak *from heaven*, from the midst of his saints and angels (so some understand it), the holy society of which may be called *Zion and Jerusalem*; for, when we come to the *heavenly Jerusalem*, we come to the *innumerable company of angels*; see Heb. xii. 22, 25. Now his speaking in that day will be to the wicked as *roaring*, terrible as the roaring of a lion (for so the word signifies); he long kept silence, but now *our God shall come, and shall not keep silence*, Ps. l. 3, 21. Note, The judgment of the great day will make the ears of those to tingle that continue the implacable enemies of God's kingdom. God's voice will then *shake terribly both heaven and earth* (Isa. ii. 21), yet *once more*, Hag. ii. 6; Heb. xii. 26. This denotes that the voice of God will in the great day speak such terror to the wicked as were enough to put even heaven and earth into a consternation. When God comes to pull down and destroy his enemies, and make them all his footstool, though heaven and earth should stand up in defence of them and undertake their protection, it shall be all in vain. Even they shall shake before him and be an insufficient shelter to those whom he comes forth to contend with. Note, As blessings out of Zion are the sweetest blessings, and enough to make heaven and earth sing, so terrors out of Zion are the sorest terrors, and enough to make heaven and earth shake. 2. To the righteous it will be a joyful day. When heaven and earth shall tremble, and be dissolved and burnt up, then will the Lord be the *hope of his people and the strength of the*



children of Israel (v. 16), and then shall Jerusalem be holy, v. 17. The saints are the Israel of God; they are *his people*; the church is his Jerusalem. They are in covenant and communion with him; now in the great day, (1.) Their longings shall be satisfied: *The Lord will be the hope of his people*. As he always was the founder and foundation of their hopes, so he then will be the crown of their hopes. He will be the *harbour* of his people (so the word is), their receptacle, refuge, and home. The saints in the great day shall arrive at the desired haven, shall put to shore after a stormy voyage; they shall go to be for ever at home with God, to their Father's house, the house *not made with hands*. (2.) Their happiness shall be confirmed. God will be in that day the *strength of the children of Israel*, enabling them to bid that day welcome and to bear up under the weight of its glories and joys. In this world, when the judgments of God are abroad, and sinners are falling under them, God is and will be the hope and strength of his people, the strength of their heart, and their portion, when other men's hearts fail them for fear. (3.) Their holiness shall be completed (v. 17): *Then shall Jerusalem be holy*, the *holy city* indeed; such shall the heavenly Jerusalem be, such the glorious church, *without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*. *Jerusalem shall be holiness* (so the word is); it shall be perfectly holy; there shall be no remainder of sin in it. The gospel-church is a holy society, even in its militant state, but will never be holiness itself till it comes to be triumphant. *Then no stranger shall pass through her any more*; there shall not enter into the New Jerusalem any thing that defiles or works iniquity; none shall be there but those who have a right to be there, none but its own citizens; for it shall be an unmixed society. (4.) God shall in all this be manifested and magnified: *So shall you know that I am the Lord your God*. By the sanctifying and glorifying of the church God will be known in his holiness and glory, as the God that dwells in his holy mountain and makes it holy by dwelling in it; and those that are sanctified and glorified are so *through the knowledge of him* that called them. The knowledge which true believers have of God is, [1.] An appropriating knowledge. They know that he is *the Lord their God*, yet not theirs only, but theirs in common with the whole church, that he is their God, but *dwelling in Zion his holy mountain*; for, though faith appropriates, it does not engross or monopolize the privileges of the covenant. [2.] It is an experimental knowledge. They shall find him their *hope and strength* in the worst of times, and so they shall know that *he is the Lord their God*. Those know best the goodness of God who have tasted and seen it, and have found him good to them.

18 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim. 19 Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence *against* the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. 20 But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. 21 For I will cleanse their blood *that* I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.

These promises with which this prophecy concludes have their accomplishment in part in the kingdom of grace, and the comforts and graces of all the faithful subjects of that kingdom, but will have their full accomplishment in the kingdom of glory; for, as to the Jewish church, we know not of any event concerning that which answers to the extent of these promises, and what instances of peace and prosperity they were blessed with, which these may be supposed to be a hyperbolic description of, they were but figures of *better things reserved for us, that they in their best estate without us might not be made perfect*.

I. It is promised that the enemies of the church shall be vanquished and brought down, v. 19. Egypt, that old enemy of Israel, and Edom, which had an inveterate enmity to Israel, derived from Esau, these *shall be a desolation, a desolate wilderness*, no more to be inhabited; they have become the *people of God's curse*; so the Idumeans were, Isa. xxxiv. 5. No strength nor wealth of a nation is a defence against the judgments of God. But what is the quarrel God has with these potent kingdoms? It is for their *violence against the children of Judah*, and the injuries they had done them; see Ezek. xxv. 3, 8, 12, 15; xxvi. 2. They had *shed the innocent blood* of the Jews that fled to them for shelter or were making their escape through their country. Note, The innocent blood of God's people is very precious to him, and not a drop of it shall be shed but it shall be reckoned for. In the last day this earth, which has been filled with violence against the people of God, shall be made a desolation, when it and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up. And, sooner or later, the oppressors and persecutors of God's Israel shall be brought down and laid in the dust, nay, they will at length be brought down and laid in the flames.

II. It is promised that the church shall be very happy; and truly happy it is in spiritual privileges, even during its militant state, but much more when it comes to be triumphant. Three things are here promised it:—

1. Purity. This is put last here, as a reason for the rest (v. 21); but we may consider it first, as the ground and foundation of the rest: *I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed*, that is, their bloody heinous sins, especially shedding innocent blood; that filth and guilt they had contracted by sin, which rendered them unfit for communion with God, and made them odious to his holiness and obnoxious to his justice; this they shall be washed from in the *fountain opened*, Zech. xiii. 1. That shall be cleansed by the blood of Christ which could not be cleansed by the sacrifices and purifications of the ceremonial law. Or, if we apply it to the happiness of a future state, it intimates the cleansing of the saints from all these corruptions from which they were not cleansed either by ordinances or providences in this world; there shall not be the least remains of sin in them there. Here, though they are washing daily, there is still something that is not cleansed; but in heaven, even that also shall be done away. And the reason is because *the Lord dwells in Zion*, dwells with his church, and much more gloriously with that in heaven, and *holiness becomes his house for ever*, for which reason, where he dwells there must be, there shall be, a perfection of holiness. Note, Though the refining and reforming of the church is work that goes on slowly, and still there is something we complain of that is *not cleansed*, yet there is a day coming when every thing that is amiss shall be amended, and the church shall be all fair, and no spot, no stain in her; and we must wait for that day.

2. Plenty, v. 18. This is put first, because it is the reverse of the judgment threatened in the foregoing chapters. (1.) The streams of this plenty overflow the land and enrich it: *The mountains shall drop new wine and the hills shall flow with milk*, such great abundance shall they have of suitable provision, both for *babes and strong men*. It intimates the abundance of vineyards, and all fruitful; and the abundance of cattle in the pastures that fill them with milk. And, to make the corn-land fruitful, the *rivers of Judah shall flow with water*, so that the country shall be like the garden of Eden, well-watered every where and greatly enriched, Ps. lxxv. 9. But this seems to be meant spiritually; the graces and comforts of the new covenant are compared to *wine and milk* (Isa. lv. 1), and the Spirit to *rivers of living water*, John vii. 38. And these gifts abound much more under the New Testament than they did under the Old; when believers receive *grace for grace* from Christ's fulness, when they are enriched

with *everlasting consolations*, and *filled with joy and peace in believing*, then *the mountains drop new wine*, and *the hills flow with milk*. *Drink you, drink abundantly, O beloved!*

When there is a plentiful effusion of the Spirit of grace, then the *rivers of Judah flow with water*, and make glad, not only *the city of our God* (Ps. xlv. 4), but the whole land.

(2.) The fountain of this plenty is in the *house of God*, whence the streams take their rise, as those *waters of the sanctuary* (Ezek. xlvii. 1) from *under the threshold of the house*, and the river of life out of *the throne of God and the Lamb*, Rev. xxii. 1. The psalmist, speaking of Zion, says, *All my springs are in thee*, Ps. lxxxvii. 7. Those that take temporal blessings to be meant in the former part of the verse, yet by this *fountain out of the house of the Lord* understand the grace of God, which, if we abound in temporal blessings, we have so much the more need of, that we may not abuse them. Christ himself is this fountain; his merit and grace cleanse us, refresh us, and make us fruitful. This is said to water *the valley of Shittim*, which lay a great way off from the temple at Jerusalem, on the other side of Jordan, and was a dry and barren valley, which intimates that gospel-grace, flowing from Christ, shall reach far, even to the Gentile world, to the most remote regions of it, and shall make those to abound in the fruits of righteousness who had long lain as the barren wilderness. This grace is a fountain overflowing, ever-flowing, from which we may be continually drawing, and yet need not fear its being drawn dry. This fountain comes out of *the house of the Lord*; for those that would partake of the promised graces and comforts must diligently and constantly attend upon instituted ordinances; and from *the house of the Lord* above, from his temple in heaven, flows all that good which here we are daily tasting the streams of, but hope to be shortly, hope to be eternally, drinking at the fountain-head of.

3. Perpetuity. This crowns all the rest (v. 20): *Judah shall dwell for ever* (when Egypt and Edom are made a desolation), and Jerusalem shall continue *from generation to generation*. This is a promise, and a precious promise it is, (1.) That the church of Christ shall continue in the world to the end of time. As one generation of professing Christians passes away, another shall come, in whom the *throne of Christ shall endure for ever*, and the *gates of hell shall not prevail* against it. (2.) That all the living members of that church (Judah and Jerusalem are put for the *inhabitants* of that city and country, Matt. iii. 5) shall be established in their happiness to the utmost ages of eternity. This new Jerusalem shall be *from generation to generation*, for it is a city that has foundations, not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.



AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE PROPHECY OF  
A M O S.

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THOUGH this prophet appeared a little before Isaiah, yet he was not, as some have mistaken, that Amos who was the Father of Isaiah (Isa. i. 1), for in the Hebrew their names are very different; their families too were of a different character, for Isaiah was a courtier, Amos a country-farmer. Amos signifies a *burden*, whence the Jews have a tradition that he was of a slow tongue and spoke with stammering lips; we may rather, in allusion to his name, say that his speech was *weighty* and his word the *burden of the Lord*. He was (as most think) of Judah, yet prophesied chiefly against Israel, and at Bethel, *ch. vii. 13*. Some think his style savours of his extraction, and is more plain and rustic than that of some other of the prophets; I do not see it so; but it is plain that his matter agreed with that of his contemporary Hosea, that *out of the mouth of these two witnesses the word might be established*. It appears by his contest with Amaziah the priest of Bethel that he met with opposition in his work, but was a man of undaunted resolution in it, faithful and bold in reproving sin and denouncing the judgments of God for it, and pressing in his exhortations to repentance and reformation. He begins with threatenings against the neighbouring nations that were enemies to Israel, *ch. i. and ii.* He then calls Israel to account, and judges them for their idolatry, their unworthy walking under the favours God had bestowed upon them, and their incorrigibleness under his judgments, *ch. iii. and iv.* He calls them to repentance (*ch. v.*), rejecting their hypocritical sacrifices unless they did repent. He foretels the desolations that were coming upon them notwithstanding their security (*ch. vi.*), some particular judgments (*ch. vii.*), particularly on Amaziah; and, after other reproofs and threatenings (*ch. viii. and ix.*), concludes with a promise of the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom and the happiness of God's spiritual Israel therein, just as the prophecy of Joel concluded. These prophets, having opened the wound in their reproofs and threatenings, which show all wrong, in the promises of gospel-grace open the remedy, which alone will set all to rights.

#### CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, I. The general title of this prophecy (ver. 1), with the general scope of it, ver. 2. II. God's particular controversy with Syria (ver. 3—5), with Palestine (ver. 6—8), with Tyre (ver. 9, 10), with Edom (ver. 11, 12), and with Ammon (ver. 13—15), for their cruelty to his people and the many injuries they had done them. This explains God's pleading with the nations, Joel iii. 2.

THE words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. 2 And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

Here is, I. The general character of this prophecy. It consists of *the words which the prophet saw*. Are words to be seen? Yes, God's words are; the apostles speak of the

*word of life*, which they had not only *heard*, but *which they had seen with their eyes*, *which they had looked upon*, and *which their hands had handled* (1 John i. 1), such a real substantial thing is the word of God. The prophet saw these words, that is, 1. They were revealed to him in a *vision*, as John is said to see *the voice* that spoke to him, Rev. i. 12. 2. That which was foretold by them was to him as certain as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. It intimates how strong he was in that faith which is *the evidence of things not seen*.

II. The person by whom this prophecy was sent—*Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa*, and was one of them. Some think he was a rich dealer in cattle; the word is used concerning the king of Moab (2 Kings iii. 4, *He was a sheep-master*); it is probable that he got money by that business, and yet he must quit it, to follow God as a prophet. Others think he was a poor keeper of cattle, for we find (*ch. vii. 14, 15*) that he was withal a *gatherer of wild figs*, a poor employment

by which we may suppose he could but just get his bread, and that God took him, as he did David, from following the flock, and Elisha from following the plough. Many were trained up for great employments, in the quiet, innocent, contemplative business of shepherds. When God would send a prophet to reprove and warn his people, he employed a shepherd, a herdsman, to do it; for they had made themselves *as the horse and mule that have no understanding*, nay, worse than the *ox that knows his owner*. God sometimes chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, 1 Cor. i. 27. Note, Those whom God has endued with abilities for his service ought not to be despised nor laid aside for the meanness either of their origin or of their beginnings. Though Amos himself is not ashamed to own that he was a herdsman, yet others ought not to upbraid him with it nor think the worse of him for it.

III. The persons concerned in the prophecy of this book; it is *concerning Israel*, the *ten tribes*, who were now ripened in sin and ripening apace for ruin. God had raised them up prophets among themselves (ch. ii. 11), but they regarded them not; therefore God sends them one from Tekoa, in the land of Judah, that, coming from another country, he might be the more valued, and perhaps he was the rather sent out of his own country because there he was despised for his having been a herdsman. See Matt. xiii. 55—57.

IV. The time when these prophecies were delivered. 1. The book is dated, as laws used to be, by the reigns of the kings under whom the prophet prophesied. It was in the days of *Uzziah king of Judah*, when the affairs of that kingdom went very well, and of *Jeroboam the second king of Israel*, when the affairs of that kingdom went pretty well; yet then they must both be told both of the sins they were guilty of and of the judgments that were coming upon them for those sins, that they might not with the present gleam of prosperity flatter themselves either into an opinion of their innocence or a confidence of their perpetual security. 2. It is dated by a particular event to which his prophecy had a reference; it was *two years before the earthquake*, that earthquake which is mentioned to have been *in the days of Uzziah* (Zech. xiv. 5), which put the nation into a dreadful fright, for it is there said, *They fled before it*. But how could they flee from it? Some conjecture that this earthquake was at the time of Isaiah's vision, when the *posts of the door were moved*, Isa. vi. 4. The tradition of the Jews is that it happened just at the time when Uzziah presumptuously invaded the priest's office and went in to burn incense, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. Josephus mentions this earthquake, *Antiq.* ix. 11, and says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off; and it spoiled the king's gardens." God by

this prophet gave warning of it *two years* before, that God by it would shake down their houses, ch. iii. 15.

V. The introduction to these prophecies, containing the general scope of them (v. 2): *The Lord will roar from Zion*. His threatenings by his prophets, and the executions of those threatenings in his providence, will be as terrible as the roaring of a lion is to the shepherds and their flocks. Amos here speaks the same language with his contemporaries, Hosea (ch. xi. 10) and Joel, ch. iii. 16. The lion roars before he tears; God gives warning before he strikes. Observe, 1. Whence this warning comes—from *Zion* and *Jerusalem*, from the oracles of God there delivered; for *by them is thy servant warned*, Ps. xix. 11. Our God, whose special residence is there, will issue out warrants, *given at that court*, as it were, for the executing of judgments on the land. See Jer. xxv. 30. In *Zion* was the mercy-seat; thence the Lord roars, intimating that God's acts of justice are consistent with mercy, allayed and mitigated by mercy, nay, as they are warnings, they are really acts of mercy. We are chastened, that we may not be condemned. 2. What effect the warning has: *The habitations of the shepherds mourn*, either because they fear the roaring lion or because they feel what is signified by that comparison, the consequences of a *great drought* (ch. iv. 7), which made *the top of Carmel* (of the most fruitful fields) to *wither* and become as a desert, Joel i. 12—17.

3 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: 4 But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. 5 I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD. 6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver *them* up to Edom: 7 But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof: 8 And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron: and



the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord God. 9 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: 10 But I will send a fire on the wall of Tyrus, which shall devour the palaces thereof. 11 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever: 12 But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah. 13 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border: 14 But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof, with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind: 15 And their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith the LORD.

That the Lord says here may be explained by what he says Jer. xii. 14, *Thus saith the Lord, against all my evil neighbours that touch the inheritance of my people Israel, Behold, I will pluck them out.* Damascus was a near neighbour to Israel on the north, Tyre and Gaza on the west, Edom on the south, Ammon and (in the next chapter) Moab on the east; and all of them had been, one time, one way, or other, *pricking briars and grieving thorns* to Israel, evil neighbours to them; and, because God espouses his people's cause, he there calls them *his evil neighbours*, and here comes forth to reckon with them. The method taken in dealing with each of them is, in part, the same, and therefore we put them together, and yet in each there is something peculiar.

I. Let us see what is repeated, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, concerning them all. The controversy God has with each of them is prefaced with, *Thus saith the Lord*, Jehovah the God of Israel. Though those nations will not worship him as their God, yet they shall be made to know

that they are accountable to him as their Judge. The God of Israel is *the God of the whole earth*, and has something to say to them that shall make them tremble. Against them the Lord *roars out of Zion*. And before God, by the prophet, threatens Israel and Judah, he denounces judgments against those nations whom he made use of as scourges to them for their being so, which might serve for a check to their pride and insolence and a relief to his people under their dejections; for hereby they might see that God had not quitted his interest in them, and therefore might hope they had not lost their interest in him. Now as to all these nations here arraigned,

1. The indictment drawn up against them all is thus far the same, (1.) That they are charged in general with *three transgressions, and with four*, that is, with many transgressions (as by one or two we mean a few, so by three or four we mean many, as in Latin a man that is very happy is said to be *terque quaterque beatus—three and four times happy*); or with *three and four*, that is, with seven transgressions, a number of perfection, intimating that they have *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, and are ripe for ruin; or with *three* (that is, a variety of sins) and with a *fourth* especially, which is specified concerning each of them, though the other three are not, as Prov. xxx. 15, 18, 21, 29, where we read of *three things, yea, four*, generally one seems to be more especially intended. (2.) That the particular sin which is fastened upon as the fourth, and which alone is specified, is the sin of persecution; it is some mischief or other done to the people of God that is particularly charged upon every one of them, for persecution is the measure-filling sin of any people, and it is this sin that will be particularly reckoned for—I was hungry, and you gave me no meat; much more if it may be said, I was hungry, and you took my meat from me.

2. The judgment given against them all is thus far the same, (1.) That, their sin having risen to such a height, *God will not turn away the punishment thereof*. Though he has granted them a long reprieve, and has often *turned away their punishment*, yet now he will turn it away no longer, but justice shall take its course. “*I will not revoke it*” (so some read it); I will not recal the voice which has *gone forth* from Zion and Jerusalem (v. 2), speaking death and terror to the sinful nations.” It is an irrevocable sentence. God has spoken it, and he will not *call it back*. Note, Though God bear long, he will not bear always, with those that provoke him; and, when the decree brings forth, it will bring up. (2.) That God will *kindle a fire* among them; this is said concerning all these *evil neighbours*, v. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14. God will *send a fire* into their cities. When fires are kindled that lay cities, towns, and houses in ashes, whether designedly or casually,



God must be acknowledged in it; they are of his sending. Sin stirs up the fire of his jealousy, and that kindles other fires.

II. Let us see what is mentioned, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, that is peculiar to each of them, that every one may take his portion.

1. Concerning Damascus, the head-city of Syria, a kingdom that was often vexatious to Israel. (1.) The peculiar sin of Damascus was using the Gileadites barbarously: *They threshed Gilead with threshing-instruments of iron* (v. 3), which may be understood literally of their putting to the torture, or to cruel deaths, the inhabitants of Gilead whom they got into their hands, as David put the Ammonites under *saws and harrows*, 2 Sam. xii. 31. We read with what inhumanity Hazael king of Syria prosecuted his wars with Israel (2 Kings viii. 12); he *dashed their children, and ripped up their women with child*; and see what desolations he made in their land, 2 Kings x. 32, 33. Or it may be taken figuratively, for his laying the country waste, and this very similitude is used in the history of it. 2 Kings xiii. 7, *He destroyed them, and made them like the dust by threshing*. Note, Men often do that unjustly and wickedly, and shall be severely reckoned with for it, which yet God justly permits them to do. The church is called *God's threshing, and the corn of his floor* (Isa. xxi. 10); but if men make it their threshing, and the chaff of their floor, they shall be sure to hear of it. (2.) The peculiar punishment of Damascus is. [1.] That the fire which shall be sent shall fasten upon the court in the first place, not on the chief city, nor the country towns, but on the house of Hazael, which he built; and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad, the royal palaces inhabited by the kings of Syria, many of whom were of that name. Note, Even royal palaces are no defence against the judgments of God, though ever so richly furnished, though ever so strongly fortified. [2.] That the enemy shall force his way into the city (v. 5): *I will break the bar of Damascus*, and then the gate flies open. Or it may be understood figuratively: all that which is depended upon as the strength and safety of that great city shall fail, and prove insufficient. When God's judgments come with commission it is in vain to think of turning them out. [3.] That the people shall be destroyed with the sword: *I will cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, the valley of idolatry*, for the gods of the Syrians were gods of the valleys (1 Kings xx. 23), were worshipped in valleys; as the idols of Israel were worshipped on the hills; *him also that holdeth the sceptre of power*, some petty king or other that used to boast of the sceptre he held from Beth-Eden, the house of pleasure. Both those that were given to idolatry and those that were given to sensuality should be cut off together. [4.] That the body of the nation shall be carried off.

The people shall go into captivity unto Kir, which was in the country of the Medes. We find this fulfilled (2 Kings xvi. 9) about fifty years after this, when the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin, at the instigation of Ahaz king of Judah.

2. Concerning Gaza, a city of the Philistines, and now the metropolis of that country. (1.) The peculiar sin of the Philistines was carrying away captive the whole captivity, either of Israel or Judah, which some think refers to that inroad made upon Jehoram when they took away all the king's sons and all his substance (2 Chron. xxi. 17), or, perhaps, it refers to their seizing those that fled to them for shelter when Sennacherib invaded Judah, and selling them to the Grecians (Joel iii. 4—6), or (as here) to the Edomites, who were always sworn enemies to the people of God. They spared none, but carried off all they could lay their hands on, designing, if possible, to cut off the name of Israel, Ps. lxxxiii. 4—7. (2.) The peculiar punishment of the Philistines is that the fire which God will send shall devour the palaces of Gaza, and that the inhabitants of the other cities of the Philistines, Ashdod (or Azotus), Ashkelon, and Ekron, shall all be cut off, and God will make as thorough work with them in their ruin as they would have made with God's people when they carried away the whole captivity; for even the remnant of them shall perish, v. 8. Note, God will make a full end of those that think to make a full end of his church and people.

3. Concerning Tyre, that famous city of wealth and strength, that was itself a kingdom, v. 9. (1.) The peculiar sin of Tyre is delivering up the whole captivity to Edom, that is, selling to the Edomites those of Israel that fled to them for shelter, or in any way fell into their hands; not caring what hardships they put upon them, so that they could but make gain of them to themselves. Herein they forgot the brotherly covenant, the league that was between Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre (1 Kings v. 12), which was so intimate that Hiram called Solomon his brother, 1 Kings ix. 13. Note, It is a great aggravation of enmity and malice when it is the violation of friendship and of a brotherly covenant. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in the punishment of Tyrus but that the palaces thereof shall be devoured, which was done when Nebuchadnezzar took it after thirteen years' siege. Their merchants were all princes, and their private houses were as palaces; but the fire shall make no more of them than of cottages.

4. Concerning Edom, the posterity of Esau. (1.) Their peculiar sin was an unmerciful, unwearied, pursuit of the people of God, and their taking all advantages against them to do them a mischief, v. 11. He did pursue his brother with the sword, not



only of old, when the king of Edom took up arms to oppose the children of Israel's passage *through his border* (Num. xx. 18), but ever since upon all occasions; they had not strength and courage enough to face them in the field of battle, but, whenever any other enemy had put Judah or Israel to flight, then the Edomites set in with the pursuers, fell upon the rear, slew those that were half dead already, and (as is usual with cowards when they have an enemy at an advantage) they did *cast off all pity*. Those that are least courageous are commonly most cruel. Edom was so; his malice *destroyed his compassion* (so the word is); he stripped himself of the tenderness of a man, and put on the fierceness of a beast of prey; and, as such a one, he did *tear, his anger did tear perpetually*. His cruelty was insatiable, and he never knew when he had sucked enough of the blood of Israel, but, like the horse-leech, still cried, *Give, give*. Nay, he *kept his wrath for ever*; when he wanted objects of his wrath, and opportunity to show it, yet he kept it in reserve (it *rested in his bosom*), he rolled it under his tongue as a sweet morsel, and had it ready to spit in the face of Israel upon the next occasion. Cursed be such cruel wrath, and anger so fierce, so outrageous, which makes men like the devil, who *continually seeks to devour*, and unlike to God, who *keeps not his anger for ever*. Edom's malice was unnatural, for thus he pursued his brother, whom he ought to have protected: it was hereditary, as if it had been entailed upon the family ever since Esau hated Jacob, and time itself could not wear it out, no, nor the brotherly conduct of Israel towards them (Deut. ii. 4), and the express law given to Israel (Deut. xxiii. 7), *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother*. (2.) Here is nothing peculiar in their punishment; but (v. 12) a *fire shall be sent to devour their palaces*. Note, The fire of our anger against our brethren kindles the fire of God's anger against us.

5. Concerning the Ammonites, v. 13—15. (1.) See how violently the fire of their anger turned against the people of God; they not only triumphed in their calamities (as we find, Ezek. xxv. 2, 6), but they did themselves use them barbarously; they *ripped up the women with child of Gilead*, a piece of cruelty the very mention of which strikes a horror upon one's mind; one would think it not possible that any of the human race should be so inhuman. Hazael was guilty of it, 2 Kings viii. 12. It was done not only in a brutish rage, which falls without consideration upon all that comes before it, but with a devilish design to extirpate the race of Israel by killing not only all that were born, but all that were to be born, worse than Egyptian cruelty. It was *that they might enlarge their border*, that they might make the land of Gilead their own, and there might be none to lay claim to it or

give them any disturbance in the possession of it. We find (Jer. xlix. 1) that the Ammonites inherited *Gad* (that is, Gilead) under pretence that Israel had no sons, no heirs. We know how heavy the doom of those was, and how heinous their crime, who said, *This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours by occupancy*. See what cruelty covetousness is the cause of, and what horrid practices those are often put upon that are greedy to *enlarge their own border*. (2.) See how violently the fire of God's anger burned against them; shall not God *visit for these things* done to any of mankind, especially when they are done to his own people? *Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* No doubt, it shall. The fire shall be kindled *with shouting in the day of battle*, that is, war shall kindle the fire; it shall be a fire accompanied with the sword, or a roaring fire, which shall make a noise like that of soldiers ready to engage, and it shall be as a *tempest in the day of the whirlwind*, which comes swiftly, furiously, and bears down all before it. Or this tempest and whirlwind shall be as bellows to the fire, to make it burn the stronger, and spread the further. It is particularly threatened that *their king and his princes shall go together into captivity*, carried away by the king of Babylon, not long after Judah was. See what changes God's providence often makes with men, or rather their own sin; kings become captives, and princes prisoners. *Milchom shall go into captivity*; some understand it of the god of the Ammonites, whom they called *Moloch—a king*. *He, and his princes*, and his priests that attended him, shall *go into captivity*; their idol shall be so far from protecting them that it shall itself go into captivity with them. Note, Those who by violence and fraud seek to enlarge their own border will justly be expelled and excluded their own border; nor is it strange if those who make no conscience of invading the rights of others be able to make no resistance against those who invade theirs.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter, I. God, by the prophet, proceeds in a like controversy with Moab as before with other nations, ver. 1—3. II. He shows what quarrel he had with Judah, ver. 4, 5. III. He at length begins his charge against Israel, to which all that goes before is but an introduction. Observe, 1. The sins they are charged with—injustice, oppression, whoredom, ver. 6—8. 2. The aggravations of those sins—the temporal and spiritual mercies God had bestowed upon them, for which they had made him such ungrateful returns, ver. 9—12. 3. God's complaint of them for their sins (ver. 13) and his threatenings of their ruin, and their utter inability to prevent it, ver. 14—16.

**T**HUS saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the *punishment* thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: 2 But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth: and Moab shall die with

tumult, with shouting, *and with the sound of the trumpet*: 3 And I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof, and will slay all the princes thereof with him, saith the LORD. 4 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: 5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. 6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; 7 That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the *same* maid, to profane my holy name: 8 And they lay *themselves* down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Here is, I. The judgment of Moab, another of the nations that bordered upon Israel. They are reckoned with and shall be punished for *three transgressions and for four*, as those before. Now, 1. Moab's fourth transgression, as theirs who were before set to the bar, was cruelty. The instance given refers not to the people of God, but to a heathen like themselves: 'The king of Moab *burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime*.' We find there was war between the Edomites and the Moabites, in which the king of Moab, in distress and rage, offered his own son for a burnt-offering, to appease his deity, 2 Kings iii. 26, 27. And it should seem that afterwards he, or some of his successors, in revenge upon the Edomites for bringing him to that extremity, having an advantage against the *king of Edom*, seized him alive and burnt him to ashes, or slew him and burnt his body, or dug up the bones of their dead king, of that particularly who had so straitened him, and, in token of his rage and fury, *burnt them to lime*, and perhaps made use of the powder of his bones for the white-washing of the walls and ceiling of his palace, that he might please himself with the sight of that monument of his revenge. *Est vindicta bonum vitâ jucundius ipsâ—Revenge is sweeter than life itself.*

It is barbarous to abuse human bodies, for we ourselves also are *in the body*; it is senseless to abuse dead bodies, nay, it is impious, for we believe and look for their resurrection; and to abuse the dead bodies of kings (whose persons and names ought to be in a particular manner respected and had in veneration) is an affront to majesty; it is an argument of a base spirit for those to trample upon a dead lion who, were he alive, would tremble before him. 2. Moab's doom for this transgression is, (1.) A judgment of death. Those that deal cruelly shall be cruelly dealt with (v. 2): *Moab shall die*: the Moabites shall be cut off with the sword of war, which kills *with tumult, with shouting, and with sound of trumpet*, circumstances that make it so much the more terrible, as the lion's roaring aggravates his tearing. *Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise*, Isa. ix. 5. (2.) It is a judgment upon their judge, who had passed the sentence upon the bones of the king of Edom that they should be burnt to lime: *I will cut him off*, says God (v. 3); he shall know there is a judge that is higher than he. The king, the chief judge, and all the inferior judges and princes, shall be cut off together. If the people sometimes suffer for the sin of their princes, yet the princes themselves shall not escape, Jer. xlviii. 47. *Thus far is the judgment of Moab.*

II. Judah also is a near neighbour to Israel, and therefore, now that justice is riding the circuit, that shall not be passed by; that nation had made itself like the heathen and mingled with them, and therefore the indictment here runs against them in the same form in which it had run against all the rest: *For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof*; their sins are as many as the sins of other nations, and we find them huddled up with them in the same character, Jer. ix. 26, "As for Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, jumble them together; they are all alike;" the sentence here also is the same (v. 5): "*I will send a fire upon Judah*, though it is the land where God is known, and it shall *devour the palaces of Jerusalem*, though it is the holy city, and God has formerly been *known in its palaces for a refuge*," Ps. xlviii. 3. But the sin here charged upon Judah is different from all the rest. The other nations were reckoned with for injuries done to men, but Judah is reckoned with for indignities done to God, v. 4. 1. They put contempt upon his statutes and persisted in disobedience to them: *They have despised the law of the Lord*, as if it were not worth taking notice of, nor had any thing in it valuable; and herein they despised the wisdom, justice, and goodness, as well as the authority and sovereignty, of the Law-maker; this they did, in effect, when they *kept not his commandments*, made no conscience of them, took no care about them.



2. They put honour upon his rivals, their idols, here called *their lies*, which caused them to err; for an image is a teacher of lies, Hab. ii. 18. And those that are led away into the error of idolatry are by that led into a multitude of other errors, *Uno dato absurdo mille sequuntur*—One absurdity draws after it a thousand. God is an infinite eternal Spirit; but, when that truth of God is by idolatry changed into a lie, all his other truths are in danger of being so changed likewise; thus their idols caused them to err, and God justly gave them up to strong delusions; nor was it any excuse for their sin that they were the lies after which their fathers walked, for they should rather have taken warning than taken pattern by those that perished with these lies in their right hand.

III. We now at length come to the words which Amos saw concerning Israel. The reproofs and threatenings having walked the round, here they centre, here they settle. He begins with them as with the rest: *For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof*; if all these nations must be punished for their iniquities, shall Israel go unpunished? Observe here what their sins were, for which God would reckon with them. 1. Perverting justice. This was the sin of those who were entrusted with the administration of justice, the judges and magistrates, and all parties concerned. They made nothing of selling a righteous man, and his righteous cause when it came to be tried before them, for a piece of silver; sentence was passed, not according to the merits of the cause, but the bribe always turned the scale, and judgment was set to sale by auction to the highest bidder. They would sell the life and livelihood of a poor man for a pair of shoes, for the least advantage to themselves that could be proposed to them; give them but a pair of shoes, and the cause of a poor man, who could not give them as much as that, should be betrayed, and left at the mercy of those that will have no mercy. They will rather play at small game than sit out. *For a piece of bread such a man will transgress*. Note, Those who will wrong their consciences for any thing will come at length to do it for next to nothing; those who begin to sell justice for silver will in time be so sordid as to sell it for a pair of shoes, for a pair of old shoes. 2. Oppressing the poor, and seeking to benefit themselves by doing them a mischief: *They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor*; they swallow up the poor with the utmost greediness, and make a prey of those that are in sorrow with dust on their heads, poor orphans that are in mourning for their parents; they catch at them to get their estates into their hands; they never rest till they have got the heads of the poor in the dust, to be trodden on. Or, *They pant after the dust of the earth*, that is, silver and gold, white and yellow dust; they covet it ear-

nestly, and levy it upon the head of the poor, by their unjust exactions. Note, Men's seeking to enrich themselves by the impoverishing of others is a transgression which God will not long turn away the punishment of. This is *turning aside the way of the meek*, contriving to do injury to those who, they know, are mild and patient and will bear injury. They invade their rights, break their measures, and obstruct the course of justice in favour of them, not suffering them to go on with their righteous cause; this is *turning aside their way*. Note, The more patiently men bear the injuries that are done them the greater is the sin of those that injure them, and the more occasion they have to expect that God will give them redress, and take vengeance for them. *I, as a deaf man, heard not, and then thou wilt hear*. 3. Abominable uncleanness, even incest itself, such as is not named among the Gentiles, that a man should have his father's wife, (1 Cor. v. 1), his father's concubine: *A man and his father will go in unto the same young woman*, as black an instance as any other of an unbounded promiscuous lust; and yet where the former iniquities of oppression and extortion are this also is found; for laws of modesty seldom hold those that have broken the bands of justice and cast away its cords from them. This wickedness is such a scandal to religion, and the profession of it, that those who are guilty of it are looked upon as designing thereby to profane God's holy name, and to render it odious among the heathen, as if he countenanced the villanies which those who pretend relation to him allow themselves in, and were altogether such a one as they. 4. Regaling themselves, and yet pretending to honour their God with that which they had got by oppression and extortion, v. 8. They add idolatry to their injustice, and then think to atone for their injustice with their idolatry. (1.) They make merry with that which they have unjustly squeezed from the poor. They lay themselves down at ease, and in state, and stretch themselves upon clothes laid to pledge, which they ought to have restored the same night, according to the law, Deut. xxiv. 12, 13. And they drink the wine of the condemned, of such as they have fined and laid heavy mulcts upon, spending that in sensuality which they have got by injustice. (2.) They think to make atonement for this by feasting on the gains of oppression before their altars, and drinking this wine in the house of their God, in the temples where they worshipped their calves, as if they would make God a partner in their crimes by making him a partner of the profits of them—service good enough for false gods; but the true God will not thus be mocked; he has declared that he hates robbery for burnt-offerings, and cannot be served acceptably but with that which is got honestly



9 Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height *was* like the height of the cedars, and he *was* strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. 10 Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. 11 And I raised up of your sons for prophets. *Is it* not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD. 12 But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not. 13 Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed *that is* full of sheaves. 14 Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: 15 Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and *he that is* swift of foot shall not deliver *himself*: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself. 16 And *he that is* courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

Here, I. God puts his people Israel in mind of the great things he had done for them, in putting them into possession of the land of Canaan, the greatest part of which these ten tribes now enjoyed, *v.* 9, 10. Note, We need often to be reminded of the mercies we have received, which are the heaviest aggravations of the sins we have committed. God gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our meanness and unworthiness, and the disproportion between his gifts and our merits; but he justly upbraids us with our ingratitude, and ill requital of his favours, and tells us what he has done for us, to shame us for not rendering again according to the benefit done to us. "*Son, remember; Israel, remember, 1. That God brought thee out of a house of bondage, rescued thee out of the land of Egypt, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished in slavery.*" 2. *That he led thee forty years through a desert land, and fed thee in a wilderness, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished with hunger. Mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us, for, if they had been cut off, we should not have been.* 3. *That he made room for them in Canaan, by extirpating the natives by a series of wonders little inferior to those by which they were redeemed out of Egypt: I destroyed the Amorite before them,* here put for all the devoted nations. Ob-

serve the magnificence of the enemies that stood in their way, which is taken notice of, that God may be the more magnified in the subduing of them. *They were of great stature (whose height was like the height of the cedars) and the people of Israel were as shrubs to them; and they were also of great strength, not only tall, but well-set: He was strong as the oaks.* Their kingdom was eminent among the nations, and over-topped all its neighbours. The supports and defences of it seemed impregnable; it was as fine as the stately cedar; it was as firm as the sturdy oak; yet, when God had a vine to plant there (*Ps.* lxxx 8, 9), this Amorite was not only cut down, but plucked up: *I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath*, so that the Amorites were no more a nation, nor ever read of any more. Thus highly did God value Israel. He gave men for them and people for their life, *Isa.* xliii. 4. How ungrateful then were those who put such contempt upon him! 4. That he made them possess the land of the Amorite, not only put it into their hands, so that they became masters of it *jure belli*—by right of conquest, but gave them a better title to it, so that it became theirs by promise.

II. He likewise upbraids them with the spiritual privileges and advantages they enjoyed as a holy nation, *v.* 11. They had helps for their souls, which taught them how to make good use of their temporal enjoyments and were therefore more valuable. It is true the ten tribes had not God's temple, altar, and priesthood, and it was their own fault that they deserted them, and for that they might justly have been left in utter darkness; but God left not himself without witness, nor them without guides to show them the way. 1. They had prophets that were powerful instructors in piety, divinely inspired, and commissioned to make known the mind of God to them, to show them what is pleasing to God and what displeasing, to reprove them for their faults and warn them of their danger, to direct them in their difficulties and comfort them in their troubles. God raised them up prophets, animated them for that work and employed them in it. He raised them up of their sons, from among themselves, as Moses and Christ were raised up from among their brethren, *Deut.* xviii. 15. It was an honour put upon their nation, and upon their families, that they had children of their own to be God's messengers to them, of their own language, not strangers sent from another country, whom they might suspect to be prejudiced against them and their land, but those who, they knew, wished well to them. Note, Faithful ministers are great blessings to any people, and it is God that raises them up to be so, that they may justly be reckoned an honour to the families they are of. 2. They had Nazarites that were bright examples of piety: *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*, men that



bound themselves by a vow to God and his service, and, in pursuance of that, denied themselves many of the lawful delights of sense, as drinking wine and eating grapes. There were some of their young men that were in their prime for the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life and yet voluntarily abridged themselves of them; these God raised up by the power of his grace, to be *monuments of his grace*, to his glory, and to be his witnesses against the impieties of that degenerate age. Note, It is as great a blessing to any place to have eminent good Christians in it as to have eminent good ministers in it; for so they have examples to their rules. We must acknowledge that it bodes well to any people when God raises up numbers of hopeful young people among them, when he makes their young men Nazarites, devout, and conscientious, and mortified to the pleasures of sense; and those that are such Nazarites are *purer than snow, whiter than milk*; they are indeed the polite young men, for their *polishing is of sapphires*, Lam. iv. 7. Those that have such men, such young men, among them, have therein such an advantage, both for direction and encouragement, to be religious, as they will be called to an account for another day if they do not improve. Israel is here reckoned with, not only for the prophets, but for the Nazarites, raised up among them. Concerning the truth of this, he appeals to themselves: "*Is it not even thus, O you children of Israel? Can you deny it? Have not you yourselves been sensible of the advantage you had by the prophets and Nazarites raised up among you?*" Note, Sinners' own consciences will be witnesses for God that he has not been wanting to them in the means of grace, so that, if they perish, it is because they have been wanting to themselves in not improving those means. The men of Judah shall themselves *judge between God and his vineyard*, whether he could have done more for it, Isa. v. 3, 4.

III. He charges them with the abuse of the means of grace they enjoyed, and the opposition they gave to God's designs in affording them those means, v. 12. They were so far from walking in the light that they rebelled against it, and did what they could to extinguish it, that it might not shine in their faces, to their conviction. 1. They did what they could to debauch good people, to draw them off from their seriousness in devotion and their strictness in conversation: *You gave the Nazarites wine to drink*, contrary to their vow, that, having broken it in that instance, they might not pretend to keep it in any other. Some they surprised, or allured into it, and *with their much fair speech caused them to yield*; others they forced and frightened into it, reproached and threatened them if they were more precise than their neighbours; and, by drawing them in to drink wine, they spoiled them for

Nazarites. Note, Satan and his agents are very busy to corrupt the minds of young people that look heavenward; and many that we thought would have been Nazarites they have overcome by giving them wine to drink, by drawing them in to the love of mirth and pleasure, and drinking company. Multitudes of young men that bade fair for eminent professors of religion have *erred through wine*, and been undone for ever. And how do the factors for hell triumph in the debauching of a Nazarite! 2. They did what they could to silence good ministers, and to stop their mouths: "*You commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not*, and threatened them if they did prophesy (ch. vii. 12), as if God's messengers were bound to observe your orders, and might not deliver their errand unless you gave them leave, and so you not only *received the grace of God*, in raising up those prophets, *in vain*, but put the highest affront imaginable upon that God in whose name the prophets spoke." Note, Those have a great deal to answer for that cannot bear faithful preaching, and those much more that suppress it.

IV. He complains of the wrong they did him by their sins (v. 13): "*I am pressed under you*, I am *straitened* by you, and know not what to do, Hos. xi. 8, 9. I am loaded and burdened by you, and can no longer bear it, and therefore *I will ease myself of my adversaries*, Isa. i. 24. *I am pressed under you* and the load of your sins *as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*, is loaded with corn, in the midst of the *joy of harvest*, as long as any will lie on." Note, The great God complains of sin, especially the sins of his professing people, as a burden to him. He is *grieved with this generation* (Ps. xcvi. 10), *is broken with their whorish heart* (Ezek. vi. 9), a consideration which, if it make not the sinner's repentance very deep, will make his ruin very great. The great God that upholds the world, and never complains that he is pressed under the weight of it (he *fainteth not, neither is weary*), yet complains of the sins of Israel, yea, and of their hypocritical services too, that he is *weary of bearing them*, Isa. i. 14. No wonder the *creature groans being burdened* (Rom. viii. 22), when the Creator says, *I am pressed under them*.

V. He threatens them with unavoidable ruin. And so some read, v. 13, "*Behold I will press, or straiten, your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses*; they shall be loaded with judgments till they shall sink under them, and shall make a noise, as a cart overloaded does." Those that will not submit to the convictions of the word, that will neither be won by that nor by the conversation of those about them, shall be made to sink under the weight of God's judgments. If God load us daily with his benefits, and we, notwithstanding that, load him with our sins, how can we expect any other than that he should load us with his judgments? And

it is here threatened in the last three verses that, when God comes forth to contend with this provoking people, they shall not be able to stand before him, to flee from him, nor to make their part good with him; for when God judges he will overcome. Though his patience be tired out, his power is not, and so the sinner shall find, to his cost. When the Assyrian army comes to lay the country waste by sword and captivity none shall escape, but every one shall have his share in the common desolation. 1. It will be in vain to think of fleeing from the enemy that comes armed with a commission to make all desolate: *The flight shall perish from the swift*; those that have been famed for happy escapes and happy retreats shall now find their arts fail them; they shall have no time to flee, or shall find no way to take, or they shall have no strength or spirit to attempt it; they shall be at their wits' end, and then they are soon at their flight's end. Are they, as Asahel, as *swift of foot as a wild roe*? (2 Sam. ii. 18), yet, like him, they shall run the faster upon their own destruction: *He that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself*, v. 15. Or do they say (as those, Isa. xxx. 16), *We will flee upon horses, and we will ride upon the swift*? Yet they shall be overtaken: *Neither shall he that rides the horse deliver himself from his pursuers. A horse is a vain thing for safety*. 2. It will be in vain to think of fighting it out. God is at war with them; and *are they stronger than he*? Is there any military force that can pretend to be a match for Omnipotence? No: *The strong shall not strengthen his force*. He that has a habit of strength shall not be able to exert it when he has occasion for it. And *the mighty*, who should protect and deliver others, shall not be able to *deliver himself*, to deliver *his soul* (so the word is), shall not save his life. Let not the *strong man* then glory in his strength, nor trust in it, but *strengthen himself in the Lord his God*, for in him is everlasting strength. And, as the bodily strength shall fail, so shall the weapons of war. The armour as well as the arm shall become insufficient: *Neither shall he stand that handles the bow*, though he stand at a distance, but shall betake himself to flight, and not trust to his own bow to save him. Though the arm be ever so strong, and the armour ever so well fixed, neither will avail when the spirit fails (v. 16): *He that is courageous among the mighty*, that used to look danger in the face, and not be dismayed at it, shall *flee away naked in that day*, not only disarmed, having thrown away his weapons both offensive and defensive, but plundered of his treasure, which he thought to carry away with him, and he shall think it as much as he could expect that he has *his life for a prey*. Thus when God pleases he takes away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causes those who used to boast of their

courage, and their daring enterprises in the field, to *wander and sneak in a wilderness where there is no way*, Job xii. 24.

## CHAP. III.

A stupid, senseless, headless people, are, in this chapter, called upon to take notice, 1. Of the judgments of God denounced against them and the warnings he gave them of those judgments, and to be hereby awakened out of their security, ver. 1-8. 11. Of the sins that were found among them, by which God was provoked thus to threaten, thus to punish, that they might justify God in his controvery with them, and, unless they repented and reformed, might expect no other than that God should proceed in his controvery, ver. 9-15.

**H**EAR this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. 3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed? 4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? 5 Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? 6 Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it? 7 Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. 8 The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

The scope of these verses is to convince the people of Israel that God had a controvery with them. That which the prophet has to say to them is to let them know that the Lord has something to say against them, v. 1. They were his peculiar people above others, knew his name, and were called by it; *nevertheless he had something against them*, and they were called to hear what it was, that they might consider what answer they should make, as the prisoner at the bar is told to hearken to his indictment. The children of Israel would not regard the words of counsel and comfort that God had many a time spoken to them, and now they shall be made to hear the word of reproof and threatening that the Lord has spoken against them; for he will act as he has spoken.

1. Let them know that the gracious cognizance God had taken of them, and the favours he had bestowed upon them, should not exempt them from the punishment due to them for their sins. Israel is a family that God brought up out of the land of Egypt,



(v. 1), and it was no more than a family when it went down thither; thence God delivered it; thence he fetched it to be a family to himself. It is not only the ten tribes, the kingdom of Israel, that must take notice of this, but that of Judah also, for it is spoken against the whole family that God brought up out of Egypt. It is a family that God has bestowed distinguishing favours upon, has owned in a peculiar manner. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth.* Note, God's church in the world is a family dignified above all the families of the earth. Those that know God are known of him. *In Judah is God known,* and therefore Judah is more than any people known of God. God has known them, that is, he has chosen them, covenanted with them, and conversed with them as his acquaintance. Now, one would think, it should follow, "Therefore I will spare you, will connive at your faults, and excuse you." No: *Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* Note, The distinguishing favours of God to us, if they do not serve to restrain us from sin, shall not serve to exempt us from punishment; nay, the nearer any are to God in profession, and the kinder notice he has taken of them, the more surely, the more quickly, and the more severely will he reckon with them, if they by a course of wilful sin profane their character, disgrace their relation to him, violate their engagements, and put a slight upon the favours and honours with which they have been distinguished. *Therefore they shall be punished,* because their sins dishonour him, affront him, and grieve him, more than the sins of others, and because it is necessary that God should vindicate his own honour by making it appear that he hates sin and hates it most in those that are nearest to him; if they be but as bad as others, they shall be punished worse than others, because it is justly expected that they should be so much better than others. *Judgment begins at the house of God,* begins at the sanctuary; for God will be sanctified either by or upon those that come nigh unto him, Lev. x. 3.

II. Let them know that they could not expect any comfortable communion with God unless they first made their peace with him (v. 3): *Can two walk together except they be agreed?* No; how should they? Where there is not friendship there can be no fellowship; if two persons be at variance, they must first accommodate the matters in difference between them before there can be any interchanging of good offices. Israel had affronted God, had broken their covenant with him, and ill-requited his favours to them; and yet they expected that he should continue to walk with them, should take their part, act for them, and give them assurances of his presence with them, though they took no care by repentance and reformation to agree with their adversary and to turn

away his wrath. "But how can that be?" says God. "While you continue to walk contrary to God you can look for no other than that he should walk contrary to you," Lev. xxvi. 23, 24. Note, We cannot expect that God should be present with us, or act for us, unless we be reconciled to him. God and man cannot walk together except they be agreed. Unless we agree with God in our end, which is his glory, we cannot walk with him by the way.

III. Let them know that the warnings God gave them of judgments approaching were not causeless and groundless, merely to amuse them, but certain declarations of the wrath of God against them, which (if they did not speedily repent) they would infallibly feel the effects of (v. 4): *"Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey in view? No; he roars upon his prey. Nor will a young lion cry out of his den if the old lion have taken nothing to bring home to him; nor would God thus give you warning both by the threatenings of his word, and by less judgments, if you had not by your sins made yourselves a prey to his wrath, nor if he were not really about to fall upon you with desolating destroying judgments."* Note, The threatenings of the word and providence of God are not bugbears, to frighten children and fools, but are certain inferences from the sin of man and certain presages of the judgments of God.

IV. Let them know that, as their own wickedness was the procuring cause of these judgments, so they shall not be removed till they have done their work, v. 5. When God has come forth to contend with a sinful people it is necessary that they should understand, 1. That it is their own sin that has entangled them; for *can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him?* No, nature does not lay snares for the creatures, but the art of men; a bird is not taken in a snare by chance, but with the fowler's design; so the providence of God prepares trouble for sinners, and it is *in the work of their own hands that they are snared.* Affliction does not spring out of the dust, but it is God's justice, and our own wickedness, that correct us. 2. It is nothing but their own repentance that can disentangle them; for *shall one take up a snare from the earth, which he laid with design, except he have taken something as he designed?* So neither will God remove the affliction he has sent till it have done its work and accomplished that for which he sent it. If our hearts be duly humbled, and we are brought by our afflictions to confess and forsake our sins, then the snare has taken something, then the point is gained, the end is answered, and then, and not till then, the snare is broken, is taken up from the earth, and we are delivered in love and mercy.

V. Let them know that all their troubles came from the hand of God's providence



and from the counsel of his will (v. 6): *Shall there be evil in a city*, in a family, in a nation, and the Lord has not done it, appointed it, and performed what he appointed? The evil of sin is from ourselves; it is our own doing. But the evil of trouble, personal or public, is from God, and is his doing; whoever are the instruments, God is the principal agent. *Out of his mouth both evil and good proceed.* This consideration, that, whatever evil is in the city, the Lord has done it, should engage us patiently to bear our share in public calamities and to study to answer God's intention in them.

VI. Let them know that their prophets, who give them warning of judgments approaching, deliver nothing to them but what they have received from the Lord to be delivered to his people. 1. God makes it known beforehand to the prophets (v. 7): *Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, none of that evil in the city spoken of (v. 6), but he reveals it to his servants the prophets*, though to others it is a secret. Therefore those know not what they do who make light of the warnings which the prophets give them, in God's name. Observe, God's prophets are *his servants*, whom he employs to go on his errands to the children of men. The secret of God is with them; it is in some sense with all the righteous (Prov. iii. 32), with all that fear God (Ps. xxv. 14), but in a peculiar manner with the prophets, to whom the Spirit of prophecy is a Spirit of revelation. It would have put honour enough upon prophets if it had been only said that sometimes God is pleased to reveal to his prophets what he designs to do, but it speaks something very great to say that he *does nothing* but what he reveals to them, as if they were the men of his counsel. *Shall I hide from Abraham*, who is a prophet, *the thing which I do?* Gen. xviii. 17. God will therefore be sure to reckon with those who put contempt on the prophets, whom he puts this honour upon. 2. The prophets cannot but make that known to the people which God has made known to them (v. 8): *The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?* His prophets, to whom he has spoken in secret by dreams and visions, cannot but speak in public to the people what they have heard from God. They are so full of those things themselves, so well assured concerning them, and so much affected with them, that they cannot but speak of them; for *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak. I believed; therefore have I spoken*, Acts iv. 20. Nay, and besides the prophetic impulse which went along with the inspiration, and made the word like *a fire in their bones* (Jer. xx. 9), they received a command from God to deliver what they had been charged with; and they would have been false to their trust if they had not done it. *Necessity was laid upon them*, as upon the preachers of the gospel, 1 Cor. ix. 16.

VII. Let them know that they ought to tremble before God upon the fair warning he had given them, as they would, 1. Upon the sounding of a trumpet, to give notice of the approach of the enemy, that all may stand upon their guard and stand to their arms: *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid, or run together?* so some read it, v. 6. Will they not immediately come together in a fright, to consider what is best to be done for the common safety? Yet when God by his prophets gives them notice of their danger, and summons them to come and enlist themselves under his banner, it makes no impression; they will sooner give credit to a watchman on their walls than to a prophet sent of God, will sooner obey the summons of the governor of their city than the orders given them by the Governor of the world. God says, *Hearken to the voice of the trumpet; but they will not hearken*, nay, and they tell him plainly that they will not, Jer. vi. 17. 2. Upon the roaring of a lion. God is sometimes *as a lion, and a young lion, to the house of Judah*, Hos. v. 14. The lion roars before he tears; thus God warns before he wounds. If therefore the lion roars upon a poor traveller (as he did against Samson, Judg. xiv. 5), he cannot but be put into great consternation; yet the Lord roars out of Zion (ch. i. 2), and none are afraid, but they go on securely as if they were in no danger. Note, The fair warning given to a careless world, if it be not taken, will aggravate its condemnation another day. The lion roared, and they were not moved with fear to prepare an ark. O the amazing stupidity of an unbelieving world, that will not be wrought upon, no, not by the *terrors of the Lord!*

9 Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof. 10 For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. 11 Therefore thus saith the LORD God; An adversary *there shall be* even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled. 12 Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch. 13 Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord



God, the God of hosts, 14 That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also visit the altars of Beth-el: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. 15 And I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.

The Israelites are here again convicted and condemned, and particular notice given of the crimes they are convicted of and the punishment they are condemned to.

1. Notice is given of it to their neighbours. The prophet is ordered to *publish it in the palaces of Ashdod*, one of the chief cities of the Philistines; nay, the summons must go further, even to the *palaces in the land of Egypt*. "The great men of both those nations, that dwell in the palaces, that are inquisitive concerning the affairs of the neighbouring nations, and are conversant with the public intelligence, let them *assemble themselves upon the mountains of Samaria*," v. 9. There, upon a *throne high and lifted up*, the judgment is set. Samaria is the criminal that is to be tried; let them be present at the trial, for it shall be (as other trials are) public, in the face of the country; let them make an appointment to meet there from all parts, to judge between God and his vineyard. God appeals to all impartial righteous men, Ezek. xxiii. 45. They will all subscribe to the equity of his proceedings when they see how the case stands. Note, God's controversies with sinners do not fear a scrutiny; even Philistines and Egyptians will be made to see, and say, that *the ways of the Lord are equal, but our ways are unequal*. They are likewise summoned to attend, not only that they may justify God and be witnesses for him that he deals fairly, but that they may themselves take warning; for, if *judgment begin at the house of God*, as they see it does, what shall be the end of those that are strangers to him? 1 Pet. iv. 17. *If this be done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?* Or this intimates that the sin of Israel had been so notorious that the neighbouring nations could come in witnesses against them, and therefore it was fit that their punishment should be so. "If it could have been concealed, we would have said, *Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon*;" but why should their friends consult their reputation, when they themselves do not consult it? If they have grown impudent in sin, let them bear the shame: "*Publish it in Ashdod, in Egypt*."

1. Let them see how black the charge is, and how well proved. Let them observe the behaviour of the inhabitants of Samaria; let

them look off from the adjacent hills, and they may see how rude and boisterous they are, and hear how loud the cry of their sin is, as was that of Sodom. (1.) Look into their streets and you will see nothing but riot and disorder, *great tumults in the midst thereof*: reason and justice are upon all occasions run down by the noise and fury of an outrageous mob, the dominion of which is the sin and shame of any people, and is likely to be their ruin. (2.) Look into their prisons, and you will see them filled with injured innocents: *The oppressed are in the midst thereof*, thrown down and crushed by their oppressors, overpowered and overwhelmed, and *they had no comforter*, Eccl. iv. 1. (3.) Look into their courts of justice, and you will see that those who preside in those courts *know not to do right*, because they have always been accustomed to do wrong; they act as if they had no notion at all of the thing called justice, are in no care to do justice themselves nor to see that others do justice. (4.) Look into their treasures and stores, and you will see them replenished with *violence and robbery*, with that which was unjustly got and is still unjustly kept. Thus *they have heaped treasures together for the last days*, but it will prove a *treasure of wrath against the day of wrath*. It may well be said, *Those know not to do right* who think to enrich themselves by doing wrong.

2. Let them see how heavy the doom is, and how well executed, v. 11, 12.

(1.) Their country shall be invaded and ruined; and observe how the punishment answers to the sin. [1.] *Great tumults are in the midst of the land*, and therefore an *adversary shall be even round about the land*; the Assyrian forces shall surround it and break in upon it on every side. Note, When sin is harboured and indulged in the midst of a people they can expect no other than that adversaries should be round about them, so that, go which way they will, they go into the mouth of danger, Luke xix. 43. [2.] They strengthened themselves in their wickedness, but the enemy shall *bring down their strength* from them, that strength which they abused in oppressing the poor, and doing violence to all about them. Note, That power which is made an instrument of unrighteousness will justly be brought down and broken. [3.] They *stored up robbery in their palaces*, and therefore their *palaces shall be spoiled*; for what is got and kept wrongfully will not be kept long. Even palaces will be no protection to fraud and oppression; but the greatest of men, if they have spoiled others, shall themselves be spoiled, for *the Lord is the avenger of all such*.

(2.) Their countrymen shall not escape, v. 12. They shall be in the hands of the enemy, as a lamb in the mouth of a lion, all devoured and eaten up, and they shall be utterly unable to make any resistance; and

if any do make their escape, so as neither to fall by the sword nor go into captivity, yet they shall be very few, and those of the meanest and least considerable, like *two legs*, or *shanks*, of a lamb, or, it may be, a *piece of an ear*, which the lion drops, or the *shepherd* takes from him, when he has eaten the whole body; so, perhaps, here and there one may escape from Samaria and from Damascus, when the king of Assyria shall fall upon them both, but none to make any account of; and those that do escape shall do so with the utmost difficulty and hazard, by hiding themselves in the *corner of a bed* or under the *bed's feet*, which intimates that their spirits shall be quite cowed and broken, and they shall sneak shamefully in the time of danger. They shall not hide themselves in dens and caves, but in the *corner of a bed*, or the *piece of a bed*, such as poor people must be content with. They shall very narrowly escape, as it is foretold concerning the last destruction of Jerusalem that there shall be *two in a bed together, one taken and the other left*. Note, When God's judgments come forth against a people with commission it will be in vain to think of escaping them. Some make their *dwelling in the corner of a bed*, and in a *couch*, to denote their present security and sensuality; they are at ease, as in a *bed*, or on a *couch*, but, when God comes to contend with them, he shall make them uneasy, shall take them away out of the bed of their sloth and slumber. Those that stretch themselves lazily upon their couches when God's judgments are abroad shall *go captive with the first that go captive*.

II. Notice is given of it to themselves, v. 13. Let this be *testified, and heard, in the house of Jacob*, among all the seed of Israel, for it is spoken by the Lord God, the God of hosts, who has authority to pass this sentence and ability to execute it; let them know from him that the day is at hand when God will *visit the transgressions of Israel upon him*, when he will enquire into them and reckon for them: there will come a *day of visitation*, a day of punishment, and in that day all those things they are proud of, and put confidence in, shall fail them, and so they shall smart for the sins they have been guilty of about them. 1. Woe to their altars, for God will *visit* them. He will enquire into the sins they have been guilty of at their altars, and bring into the account all their superstition and idolatry, all their expenses on their false gods, and all their expectations from them; and he will lay the altars themselves under the marks of his displeasure, for the *horns of the altar shall be cut off*, and *fall to the ground*, and with them the altar itself demolished and broken to pieces. We find the altar at Bethel prophesied against (1 Kings xiii. 2), and immediately *rent* (v. 3), and that prophecy fulfilled when *Josiah burnt men's bones upon it*, 2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16. This seconds that prophecy, and seems

to point at the same event. Note, If men will not destroy idolatrous altars, God will, and those with them that had them in veneration. Some make the *horns of the altar* to signify all those things which they flee to for refuge, and trust in, and which they make their sanctuary: they shall all be cut off, so that they shall have nothing to take hold of. 2. Woe to their houses, for God will visit them too. He will enquire into the sins they have been guilty of in their houses, the robbery they have stored up in their houses, and the luxury in which they lived: *and I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house*, v. 15. Their nobility, and gentry, and rich merchants, had their winter-houses in the city and their summer-houses in the country, so nice were they in guarding against the inconveniences of the winter when the country was thought too cold, and of the summer when the city was thought too hot, though the climate of that good land was so temperate, like that of ours, that neither the cold nor heat was ever in extremity. They indulged a foolish affectation of change and variety; but God will, either by war or by the earthquake, smite both the winter-house and the summer-house; neither shall serve to shelter them from his judgments. *The houses of ivory* (so called because the ceiling, or wainscot, or some of the ornaments of them, were edged or inlaid with ivory) *shall perish*, shall be burnt or pulled down; *and the great houses shall have an end*; the most splendid and spacious houses, the houses of their great men, shall no longer be, or at least be no longer theirs. Note, The pomp or pleasantness of men's houses will be so far from fortifying them against God's judgments that it will make them the more grievous and vexatious, as their extravagance about them will be put to the score of their sins and follies.

## CHAP. IV.

In this chapter, I. The oppressors in Israel are threatened for their oppression of the poor, ver. 1.—3. II. The idolaters in Israel, being joined to idols, are given up to their own heart's lusts, ver. 4, 5. III. All the sins of Israel are aggravated from their incorrigibleness in them, and their refusal to return and reform, notwithstanding the various rebukes of Providence which they had been under, ver. 6.—11. IV. They are invited yet at length to humble themselves before God, since it is impossible for them to make their part good against him, ver. 12, 13.

HEAR this word, ye *kine of Bashan*, that *are* in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink. 2 The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish-hooks. 3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every *cow at that which is* before her; and ye shall cast *them* into the palace, saith the LORD.



4 Come to Beth-el, and transgress; at Gilgai multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: 5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free-offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.

It is here foretold, in the name of God, that oppressors shall be humbled and idolaters shall be hardened.

1. That proud oppressors shall be humbled for their oppressions; for *he that does wrong shall receive according to the wrong that he has done*. Now observe,

1. How their sin is described, *v. 1*. They are compared to the *kine of Bashan*, which were a breed of cattle very large and strong, especially if, though bred there, they were fed upon the *mountain of Samaria*, where the pastures were extraordinarily fat. Amos had been a herdsman, and he speaks in the dialect of his calling, comparing the rich and great men, that lived in luxury and wantonness, to the *kine of Bashan*, which were wanton and unruly, would not be kept within the bounds of their own pasture, but broke through the hedges, broke down all the fences, and trespassed upon the neighbouring grounds; and not only so, but pushed and gored the smaller cattle that were not a match for them. Those that had their summer-houses upon the mountains of Samaria when they went thither for fresh air were as mischievous as the kine upon the mountains of Bashan and as injurious to those about them. (1.) They oppress the poor and needy themselves; they *crush* them, to squeeze something to themselves out of them. They took advantage of their poverty, and necessity, and inability to help themselves, to make them poorer and more necessitous than they were. They made use of their power as judges and magistrates for the invading of men's rights and properties, the poor not excepted; for they made no conscience of robbing even the hospital. (2.) They are in confederacy with those that do so. They *say to their masters* (to the masters of the poor, that abuse them and violently take from them what they have, when they ought to relieve them), "*Bring, and let us drink*"; let us feast with you upon the gains of your oppression, and then we will protect you, and stand by you in it, and reject the appeals of the poor against you." Note, What is got by extortion is commonly made use of as *provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*; and therefore men are tyrants to the poor because they are slaves to their appetites. *Bring, and let us drink*, is the language of those that *crush the needy*, as if the *tears of the oppressed*, mingled with their wine, made it drink the better. And

by their associations for drinking and reveling, and an excess of riot, they strengthen their combinations for persecution and oppression, and harden the hearts of one another in it.

2. How their punishment is described, *v. 2, 3*. God will *take them away with hooks, and their posterity with fish-hooks*; he will send the Assyrian army upon them, that shall make a prey of them, shall not only enclose the body of the nation in their net, but shall angle for particular persons, and take them prisoners and captives as with hooks and fish-hooks, shall draw them out of their own land as fish are drawn out of the water, which is their element, them and their children with them, or, They in their day shall be drawn out by one victorious enemy, and their posterity in their day by another, so that by a succession of destroying judgments they shall at length be wholly extirpated. These *kine of Bashan* thought they could no more be drawn out with a hook and a cord than the Leviathan can, Job xli.

1, 2. But God will make them know that he has a *hook for their nose* and a *bridle for their jaws*, Isa. xxxvii. 29. The enemy shall take them away as easily as the fisherman takes away the little fish, and shall make it their sport and recreation. When the enemy has made himself master of Samaria, then, (1.) Some shall attempt to escape by flight: *You shall go out at the breaches* made in the wall of the city, *every cow at that which is before her*, to shift for her own safety, and make the best of her way; and now the unruly kine of Bashan are tamed, and are themselves crushed, as they crushed the poor and needy. Note, Those to whom God has given a good pasture, if they are wanton in it, will justly be turned out of it; and those who will not be kept within the hedge of God's precept forfeit the benefit of the hedge of God's protection, and will be forced in vain to flee through the breaches they have themselves fearfully made in that hedge. (2.) Others shall think to shelter themselves, or at least their best effects, in the palace, because it is a castle well fortified and a garrison well manned: *You shall throw yourselves* (so some read it), *or throw them* (that is, your posterity, your children, or whatever is dear to you), *into the palace*, where the enemy will find it ready to be seized. Note, What is got by oppression cannot long be enjoyed with satisfaction.

3. How their sentence to this punishment is ratified: *The Lord God has sworn it by his holiness*. He had often said it, and they regarded it not; they thought God and his prophets did but jest with them; therefore he swears it *in his wrath*, and what he has sworn he will not revoke. He swears by *his holiness*, that attribute of his which is so much his glory, and which is so much glorified in the punishment of wicked people; for, as sure as God is a holy God, those that *plough*



iniquity and sow wickedness shall reap the same.

II. That obstinate idolaters shall be hardened in their idolatries (v. 4, 5): *Come to Bethel, and transgress*. It is spoken ironically: "Do so; take your course; multiply your transgressions by multiplying your sacrifices, for this liketh you; but what will you do in the end hereof?" Here we see, 1. How intent they were upon the service of their idols, and how willing they were to be at cost upon them; they brought their sacrifices, and their tithes, and their free-will offerings, hoping that therein they should be accepted of God, but it was all an abomination to him. The profuseness of idolaters in the service of their false gods may shame our strait-handedness in the service of the true and living God. 2. How they mimicked God's institutions. They had their daily sacrifice at the altar of Bethel, as God had at his altar; they had their thank-offerings as God had, only they allowed leaven in them, which God had forbidden, because their priests did not like to have the bread so heavy and tasteless as it would be if it had not leaven in it, or something to ferment it. Holy bread would not serve them, unless it were pleasant bread. 3. How well pleased they were with these services themselves: *This liketh you, O you children of Israel! So you love*. What was their own invention they were fond of and wedded to, and thought it must be pleasing to God because it was agreeable to their own fancy. 4. How they are upbraided with it: "*Come to Bethel, to Gilgal; bring the sacrifices and tithes yourselves; proclaim and publish to the nation the free-offerings, pressing them to bring in abundance of such; go on in this way;*" that is, (1.) "It is plain that you are resolved to do it, whatever God and conscience say to the contrary." (2.) "Your prophets shall let you alone in it, and not admonish you as they have done, for it is to no purpose. *Let no man strive nor rebuke his neighbour.*" (3.) "Your foolish hearts shall be more and more darkened and besotted, and you shall be quite given up to these strong delusions, to believe a lie." (4.) "What will you get by it? *Come to Bethel and multiply your sacrifices*, and see what the better you will be, what returns you will have to your sacrifices, what stead they will stand you in in the day of distress. *You shall be ashamed of Bethel your confidence,*" Jer. xlviii. 13. (5.) "*Come, and transgress, come, and multiply your transgression*, that you may fill up the measure of your iniquity and be ripened for ruin." Thus Christ said to Judas, *What thou doest do quickly*; and to the Jews, *Fill you up the measure of your fathers*, Matt. xxiii. 32.

6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet

have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when *there were yet three months to the harvest*: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. 8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured *them*: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 11 I have overthrown *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. 12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: *and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*. 13 For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what *is* his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of Hosts, *is* his name.

Here, I. God complains of his people's incorrigibleness under the judgments which he had brought upon them in order to their humiliation and reformation. He had by several tokens intimated to them his displeasure, with this design, that they might by repentance make their peace with him; but it had not that effect.

1. It is five times repeated in these verses, as the burden of the charge, "*Yet have you not returned unto me, saith the Lord*"; you have been several times corrected, but in vain; you are not reclaimed, there is no sign of amendment. You have been sent for by one messenger after another, but you have



not come back, you have not come home."

(1.) This intimates that that which God designed in all his providential rebukes was to reduce them to their allegiance, to influence them to return to him. (2.) That, if they had returned to their God, they would have been accepted, he would have bidden them welcome, and the troubles they were in would have been removed. (3.) That the reason why God sent further troubles was because former troubles had not done the work, otherwise it is *no pleasure to the Almighty that he should afflict*. (4.) That God was grieved at their obstinacy, and took it unkindly that they should force him to do that which he did so unwillingly: "*You have not returned to me from whom you have revolted, to me with whom you are in covenant, to me who stand ready to receive you, to me who have so often called you.*" Now,

2. To aggravate their incorrigibleness, and to justify himself in inflicting greater judgments, he recounts the less judgments with which he had tried to bring them to repentance.

(1.) There had sometimes been a scarcity of provisions, though there was no visible cause of it (v. 6): "*I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, for you had no meat to chew, whereby your teeth might be fouled,*" especially no flesh, which dirties the teeth. Or, *I have given you emptiness of teeth*, nothing to fill your mouths with. "*Bread*, the staff of life, has been wanting, for you have sown much and brought in little," as Hag. i. 9. Some think this refers to that seven years' famine that was in Elisha's time, which we read of 2 Kings viii. 1. Now when God thus took away their corn in the season thereof, because they had prepared it for Baal, they should have said, We will go and return to our first husband, having paid dearly for leaving him; but it had not that effect. *They have not returned to me*, saith the Lord.

(2.) Sometimes they had wanted rain, and then of course they wanted the fruits of the earth. This evil was of the Lord: *I have withholden the rain from you*. God has the key of the clouds, and, if he shut up, who can open? v. 7. The rain was withheld when there were yet three months to the harvest, at the time when they used to have it, and therefore the withholding of it was an extraordinary thing, and, if the course of nature was altered, they must therein own the hand of the God of nature; and it was at a time when they most needed it, and therefore the want of it was a very sore judgment, and blasted their expectations of a crop at harvest. And one circumstance which made this very remarkable was that when there were some places that wanted rain, and withered for want of it, there were other places near adjoining that had it in abundance. *God caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another, in the same*

country; nay, he caused it to rain upon one field, one piece of a field, and it was thereby made fruitful and flourishing, but on the next field, on the other side of the hedge, nay, on another part of the same field, it rained not at all, and it was so long without rain that all the products of it withered. No doubt this was literally true, and there were many instances of it which were generally taken notice of. Now, [1.] By this it appeared that the withholding of the rain was not casual, but by a divine direction and disposal, and that the cloud which waters the earth is turned round about by the counsels of God, to do whatsoever he commands it, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy, Job xxxvii. 12—18. Rain does not go by planets (as common people speak), but as God sends it by his winds. [2.] We have reason to think that those cities on which it rained not were the most infamous for wickedness, such as Bethel and Gilgal (v. 4), and that those on which it rained were such as retained something of religion and virtue among them. And so in the town-fields it rained or rained not, upon the piece, according as the owner was; for we are sure the curse of the Lord is in the house, and upon the ground, of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the just, and his field is a field that the Lord has blessed. [3.] It would be the greater grief and vexation to those whose fields withered for want of rain to see their neighbours' fields well watered and flourishing. *My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry*, Isa. lxxv. 13. *The wicked shall see it, and be grieved*. Probably those that were oppressed were rained upon, and so they recovered their losses, while the oppressors withered, and so lost their gains. [4.] Yet, as to the nation in general, it was a mixture of mercy with the judgment, and, consequently, strengthened the call to repentance and reformation, and encouraged them to hope for all mercy, in their returns to God, since there was so much mercy even in God's rebukes of them. But, because they did not make a good use of this gracious allay to the extremity of the judgment, they had not the benefit of it, which otherwise they might have had, for (v. 8) *two or three cities wandered at uncertainty, as beggars, unto one city, to drink water*, and, if possible, to have some to carry home with them, but *they were not satisfied*; it was but here and there one city that had water, while many wanted, and then it was not, as usual, *Usus communis aquarum—Water is free to all*. Those that had it had occasion for it, or knew not how soon they might, and therefore could afford but little to those that wanted, saying, *Lest there be not enough for us and you*. Those that came drank water, but *they were not satisfied*, because they drank it by measure, and with astonishment; and those that drink of this water shall thirst again, John iv. 13. They were not satisfied,

because their desires were greedy, and what they had God did not bless to them, Hag. i. 6. And now, one would think, when they met with all this disappointment, they should have considered their ways and repented; but it had not that effect: "*Yet have you not returned to me*, no, not so much as to pray in a right manner for the former and latter rain," Zech. x. 1. See the folly of carnal hearts; they will wander from city to city, from one creature to another, in pursuit of satisfaction, and still they miss of it; they labour for that which satisfies not (Isa. lv. 2), and yet, after all, they will not return to God, will not incline their ear to him in whom they might have satisfaction. The preaching of the gospel is as rain; God sometimes blesses one place with it more than another; some countries, some cities, are, like Gideon's fleece, wet with this dew, while the ground about is dry; all withers where this rain is wanting. But it were well if people were but as wise for their souls as they are for their bodies, and, when they have not this rain near them, would go and seek it where it is to be had; and, if they seek aright, they shall not seek in vain.

(3.) Sometimes the fruits of their ground were eaten up by caterpillars, or blasted with mildew, v. 9. Heaven and earth are armed against those who have made God their enemy. When God pleased, that is, when he was displeased, [1.] They suffered by a malignant air, the influence of which, either too hot or too cold, blasted their fruits, with a force that could be neither discerned nor resisted, and against which there was no defence. [2.] They suffered by malignant animals. Their vineyards and gardens yielded their increase in great abundance, so did their fig-trees and olive-trees; but the palmer-worm devoured them before the fruits were ripe, and fit to be gathered in. This was either the same judgment with that which we read of Joel i. 4-6, or a less judgment of the same nature, sent before to give warning of that. But they did not take warning: *Yet have you not returned unto me.*

(4.) Sometimes the plague had raged among them, and the sword of war had cut off multitudes, v. 10. The pestilence is God's messenger; this he sent among them, with directions whom to strike dead, and it was done. It was a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; deaths were scattered among them by the hand of a destroying angel at midnight. And perhaps this pestilence, as that of Egypt, fastened upon the first-born. In the way of Egypt (so the margin); when they were making their escape to Egypt, or going thither to seek for aid, the pestilence seized them by the way and stopped their journey. The sword of war is likewise the sword of the Lord; this was drawn among them with commission; and then it slew their young men, the strength of the present generation and the seed of the next. God

says, *I have slain them*; he avows the execution. The slain of the Lord are many. The enemy took away their horses, and converted them to their own use; and the dead carcasses of those that were slain either with sword or pestilence were so many, and for want of surviving friends were left so long unburied, that the stench of their camps came up into their nostrils, and was both noisome and dangerous, and might put them in mind of the offensiveness of their sin to God. And yet this did not prevail to humble and reclaim them: *You have not returned to him that smites you.* Such a rueful woeful sight as this prevailed not to make them religious.

(5.) In these and other judgments some were remarkably cut off, and made monuments of justice, others were remarkably spared, and made monuments of mercy, the setting of which the one over against the other one would have thought likely to work upon them, but it had not its effect, v. 11. [1.] Some were quite ruined, their families destroyed, and themselves in them: *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.* Perhaps they were consumed with lightning, as Sodom was, or the houses were, in some other way, burnt to the ground, and the inhabitants in them. Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be condemned with an overthrow, and so made an example, 2 Pet. ii. 6. God had threatened to destroy the whole land with such an overthrow as that of Sodom, Deut. xxix. 23. But he began with some particular places first, to give them warning, or perhaps with some particular persons, whose sins went before-hand to judgment. [2.] Others very narrowly escaped: "You were many of you as a firebrand plucked out of the burning, like Lot out of Sodom, when the fire had already kindled upon you; and yet you hate sin never the more for the danger it has brought you to, nor love God ever the more for the deliverance he wrought for you. You that have been so signally delivered, and in such a distinguishing way, have not returned unto me.

II. God, in the close, calls upon his people, now at length, in this their day, to understand the things that belong to their peace, before they were hidden from their eyes, v. 12, 13. Observe here,

1. How God threatens them with sorer judgments than any they had yet been under: "Therefore, seeing you have not been wrought upon by correction hitherto, thus will I do unto thee, O Israel!" He does not say how he will do, but it shall be something worse than had come yet, John v. 14. Or, "Thus I will go on to do unto thee, following one judgment with another, like the plagues of Egypt, till I have made a full end." Nothing but reformation will prevent the ruin of a sinful people. If they turn not to him, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. I will punish you yet seven times more, if you will



not be reformed; so it was written in the law, Lev. xxvi. 23, 24.

2. How he awakens them therefore to think of making their peace with God: "*Seeing I will do this unto thee, and there is no remedy, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!*" that is, (1.) "Consider how unable thou art to meet him as a combatant." Some make it to be spoken by way of irony or challenge: "Prepare to meet God, who is coming forth to contend with thee. What armour of proof canst thou put on? What courage canst thou steel thyself with? Alas! it is but putting *briers and thorns* before a consuming fire, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. Art thou able with less than 10,000 to meet him that comes forth against thee with more than 20,000?" Luke xiv. 31. (2.) "Resolve therefore to meet him as a penitent, as a humble suppliant, to meet him as *thy God*, in covenant with thee, to submit, and stand it out no longer." We must prepare to *meet God in the way of his judgments* (Isa. xxvi. 8), to *take hold on his strength, that we may make peace*. Note, Since we cannot flee from God we are concerned to prepare to meet him; and therefore he gives us warning, that we may prepare. When we are to meet him in his ordinances we must prepare to meet him, prepare to seek him.

3. How he sets forth the greatness and power of God as a reason why we should prepare to meet him, v. 13. If he be such a God as he is here described to be, it is folly to contend with him, and our duty and interest to make our peace with him; it is good having him our friend and bad having him our enemy. (1.) *He formed the mountains*, made the earth, the strongest stateliest parts of it, and by the word of his power still upholds it and them. Whatever are the products of the everlasting mountains, he formed them; whatever *salvation is hoped for from hills and mountains*, he is the founder of it, Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12. He that formed the *great mountains can make them plain*, when they stand in the way of his people's salvation. (2.) *He creates the wind*. The power of the air is derived from him, and directed by him; he brings the wind out of his treasures, and orders from what point of the compass it shall blow; and he that made it rules it; even *the winds and the seas obey him*. (3.) *He declares unto man what is his thought*. He makes known his counsel by his servants the prophets to the children of men, the thought of his justice against impenitent sinners, and the thought of good he thinks towards those that repent. He can also make known, for he perfectly knows, the thought that is in man's heart; he *understands it afar off*, and in the day of conviction will set the evil thoughts among the other sins of sinners *in order before them*. (4.) He often *makes the morning darkness*, by thick clouds overspreading the sky immediately after the sun rose bright and glori-

ous; so when we look for prosperity and joy he can dash our expectations with some unlooked-for calamity. (5.) *He treads upon the high places of the earth*, is not only higher than the highest, but has dominion over all, tramples upon proud men, and upon the idols that were worshipped in the highest places. (6.) *Jehovah the God of hosts is his name*, for he has his being of himself, and is the fountain of all being, and all the hosts of heaven and earth are at his command. Let us humble ourselves before this God, prepare to meet him, and give all diligence to make him our God, for happy are the people whose God he is, who have all this power engaged for them.

#### CHAP. V.

The scope of this chapter is to prosecute the exhortation given to Israel in the close of the foregoing chapter to prepare to meet their God; the prophet here tells them, I. What preparation they must make; they must "*seek the Lord*," and not seek any more to idols (ver. 4—8); they must seek good, and love it, ver. 14, 15. II. Why they must make this preparation to meet their God. 1. Because of the present deplorable condition they were in, ver. 1—3. 2. Because it was by sin that they were brought into such a condition, ver. 7, 10—12. 3. Because it would be their happiness to seek God, and he was ready to be found of them, ver. 8, 9, 14. 4. Because he would proceed, in his wrath, to their utter ruin, if they did not seek him, ver. 5, 6, 13, 16, 17. 5. Because all their confidences would fail them if they did not seek unto God, and make him their friend. (1.) Their profane contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance, would not secure them, ver. 18—20. (2.) Their external services in religion, and the shows of devotion, would not avail to turn away the wrath of God, ver. 21—24. (3.) Their having been long in possession of church-privileges, and in a course of holy duties, would not be their protection, while all along they had kept up their idolatrous customs, ver. 25—27. They have therefore no way left them to save themselves, but by repentance and reformation.

**H**EAR ye this word which I take up against you, *even* a lamentation, O house of Israel. 2 The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; *there is none* to raise her up. 3 For thus saith the Lord God; The city that went out *by* a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went forth *by* a hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel.

This chapter begins, as those two next foregoing began, with, *Hear this word*. Where God has a mouth to speak we must have an ear to hear; it is our duty, it is our interest; yet so stupid are most men that they need to be again and again called upon to *hear the word of the Lord*, to give audience, to give attention. *Hear this word*. This convincing awakening word must be heard and heeded, as well as words of comfort and peace; the word that is taken up against us, as well as that which makes for us; for, whether we hear or forbear, the word of God shall take effect, and not a tittle of it shall fall to the ground. It is the *word which I take up*—not the prophet only, but the God that sent him. It is the *word that the Lord has spoken*, ch. iii. 1. The word to be heard is a *lamentation*, a lamentable account of the present calamitous state of the kingdom of Israel, and a lamentable prediction



of its utter destruction. Their condition is sad: *The virgin of Israel has fallen* (v. 2), has come down from what she was; that state, though not pure and chaste as a virgin, yet was beautiful and gay, and had its charms; she looked high herself, and was courted by many as a virgin; but *she has fallen* into contempt and poverty, and is universally slighted. Nay, and their condition is helpless: *She shall no more rise*, shall never recover her former dignity again. God had lately begun to *cut Israel short* (2 Kings x. 32), and, because they repented not, it was not long before he *cut Israel down*. 1. Their princes, that should have helped them up, were disabled: *She is forsaken upon her land*. Not only those she was in alliance with abroad failed her, but her friends at home deserted her; she would not have been carried captive into a strange land if she had not first been *forsaken upon her own land* and *thrown to the ground* there, and all her true interests abandoned by those that should have had them at heart. *There is none to raise her up*, none that can do it, none that cares to lend her a hand. 2. Their people, that should have helped them up, were diminished, v. 3. "The city that had a militia, 1000 strong, and, in the beginning of the war, had furnished out 1000 effective men, able-bodied and well-armed, when they come to review their troops after the battle, shall find but 100 left; and, in proportion, the city that sent out 100 shall have but ten come back, so great a slaughter shall be made, and so few left to the house of Israel for the public service and safety. Scarcely one in ten shall escape of the hands that should relieve this abject, this dejected, nation. Note, The lessening of the numbers of God's spiritual Israel, by death or desertion, is just matter for lamentation; for *by whom shall Jacob arise*, by whom shall the decays of piety be repaired, when he is thus *made small*?"

4 For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: 5 But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought. 6 Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and *there be none to quench it* in Beth-el. 7 Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, 8 *Seek him* that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon

the face of the earth: the LORD is his name: 9 That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. 10 They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. 11 Forasmuch therefore as your treading *is* upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. 12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate *from their right*. 13 Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it *is* an evil time. 14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. 15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

This is a message from God to the house of Israel, in which,

I. They are told of their faults, that they might see what occasion there was for them to repent and reform, and that, when they were called to return, they might not need to ask, *Wherein shall we return?*

1. God tells them, in general (v. 12), "*I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins*; and you shall be made to know them too." In our penitent reflections upon our sins we must consider, as God does in his judicial remarks upon them, and will do in the great day, (1.) That they are very numerous; they are our *manifold transgressions*, sins of various kinds and often repeated. Oh what a multitude of vain and vile thoughts lodge within us! What a multitude of idle, foolish, wicked words have been spoken by us! In what a multitude of instances have we gratified and indulged our corrupt appetites and passions! And how many are our omissions of duty and in duty! Who can understand his errors? Who can tell how often he offends? God knows how many, just how many, our transgressions are; none of them pass him unobserved; we know that they are to us innumerable, *more than the hairs of our head*; and we have reason to see what danger we have brought ourselves into, and what abundance of work we have made for repentance, by our



manifest transgressions, by the numberless number of our sins of daily incursion. (2.) That some of them are very heinous; they are our *mighty* sins; sins that are more exceedingly sinful in their own nature and by being committed presumptuously and with a high hand, sins against the light of nature, flagrant crimes, that are mighty to overpower your convictions and to pull down judgments upon you.

2. He specifies some of these mighty sins. (1.) They corrupted the worship of God, and turned to idols; this is implied v. 5. They had sought to Bethel, where one of the golden calves was; they had frequented Gilgal, a place which they chose to set up idols in, because it had been made famous in the days of Joshua by God's wonderful appearances to and for his people. Beer-sheba likewise, a place that had been famous in the days of the patriarchs, was now another rendezvous of idols; as we find also, *ch. viii. 14.* And thither they passed, though it lay at a distance, in the land of Judah. Now, having thus shamefully gone a whoring from God, no doubt they should have felt themselves concerned to return to him. (2.) They perverted justice among themselves (v. 7): "*You turn judgment to wormwood, that is, you make your administrations of justice bitter and nauseous, and highly displeasing both to God and man.*" That fruit has become a weed, a weed in the garden; as nothing is more venerable, nothing more valuable, than justice duly administered, so nothing is more hurtful, nothing more abominable, than designedly doing wrong under colour and pretence of doing right. *Corruptio optimi est pessima*—The best, when corrupted, becomes the worst. "*You leave off righteousness in the earth, as if those that do wrong were accountable to the God of heaven only, and not to the princes and judges of the earth.*" Thus it was as before the flood, when the earth was filled with violence. (3.) They were very oppressive to the poor, and made them poorer; they trod upon the poor (v. 11), trampled upon them, hectoring over them, made them their footstool, and were most imperious and barbarous to those that were most obsequious and submissive; they cared not what shame and slavery they put those to who were poor and such as they could get nothing by. The judges aimed at nothing but to enrich themselves; and therefore they took from the poor burdens of wheat, took it by extortion, either by way of bribe or by usury. The poor had no other way to save themselves from being trodden upon, and trodden to dirt, by them, than by presenting to them horse-loads of that corn which they and their families should have had to subsist upon, and they forced them to do it. They took from the poor debts of wheat, so some read it. It was legally due either for rent or for corn lent, but they exacted it with rigour from those who were disabled by the

providence of God to pay it, as Neh. v. 2, 5. In demanding and recovering even a just debt we must take heed lest we act either unjustly or uncharitably. This sin of oppression they are again charged with (v. 12): "*They afflict the just, by turning the edge of the law and of the sword of justice against those that are the innocent and quiet in the land; they hated men because they were more righteous than themselves, and he that departed from evil thereby made himself a prey to them.*" They take a bribe from the rich to patronize and protect them in oppressing the poor, so that he who has money in his hand is sure to have the judgment on his side, be his cause ever so bad. Thus they turn aside the poor in the gate, in the courts of justice, from their right. If the poor sue for their right, who cannot bribe them; or are so honest that they will not, though they have it ever so clear in view and ever so near, yet they are turned away from it by their unrighteous sentence and cannot come at it. And therefore the prudent will keep silence, v. 13. Men will reckon it their prudence, when they are wronged and injured, to be silent, and make no complaints to the magistrates, for it will be to no purpose; they shall not have justice done them. (4.) They were malicious persecutors of God's faithful ministers and people, v. 10. Their hearts were so fully set in them to do evil that they could not bear to be reproved, [1.] By the ministry of the word, by the reading and expounding of the law, and the messages which the prophets delivered to them in the name of the Lord. *They hate him that rebukes in the gate, in the gate of the Lord's house, or in their courts of justice, or in the places of concourse, where Wisdom is lifting up her voice, Prov. i. 21.* Reprovers in the gate are reprovers by office; these they hated, counting them their enemies because they told them the truth, as Ahab hated Micaiah. They not only despised them, but had an enmity to them, and sought to do them mischief. Those that hate reproof love ruin. [2.] By the conversation of their honest neighbours. Though things were generally very bad, yet there were some among them that spoke uprightly, that made conscience of what they said, and, as it was their praise, so it was the shame of those that spoke deceitfully, and condemned them, as Noah's faith condemned the unbelief of the old world, and for that reason they abhorred them; they were such inveterate enemies to the thing called honesty that they could not endure the sight of an honest man. All that have any sense of the common interest of mankind will love and value such as speak uprightly, for veracity is the bond of human society; to what a pitch of folly and madness then have those arrived who, having banished all notions of justice out of their own hearts, would have them banished out of the world too, and so put mankind into a state of war, for they abhor him that

*speaks uprightly!* And for this reason *the prudent shall keep silence in that time*, v. 13. Prophets cannot, dare not, keep silence; the impulse they are under will not allow them to act on prudential considerations; they must *cry aloud, and not spare*. But as for other wise and good men they shall keep silence, and shall reckon it is their prudence to do so, because it is an evil time. *First*, They shall think it dangerous to complain, and therefore shall keep silence; this was one way in which they afflicted the just, that by false suggestions and strained innuendos they made men *offenders for a word* (Isa. xix. 21); and therefore *the prudent*, who were *wise as serpents*, because they knew not how what they said might be misinterpreted and misrepresented, were so cautious as to say nothing, lest they should run themselves into a premunire, because it was an evil time. Note, Through the iniquity of the times, as good men are hidden, so good men are silent, and it is their wisdom to be so; *little said soon amended*. But it is their comfort that they may speak freely to God when they know not to whom else they can speak freely. *Secondly*, They shall think it fruitless to reprove. They see what wickedness is committed, and their spirits are stirred up, as Paul's at Athens; but they shall think it prudent not to bear an open testimony against it, because it is to no purpose. They are *joined to their idols; let them alone*. *Let no man strive or rebuke another*; for it is but *casting pearls before swine*. The cautious men will say to a bold reprovcr, as Erasmus to Luther, "*Abi in cellam, et dic, Miserere mei, Domine—Away to thy cell, and cry, Have mercy on me, O Lord!*" Let grave lessons and counsels be kept for better men and better times. And there is a *time to keep silence* as well as a *time to speak*, Eccl. iii. 7. *Evil times* will not bear plain dealing, that is, *evil men* will not; and the men the prophet here speaks of had reason to think themselves evil men indeed, when wise and good men thought it in vain to speak to them and were afraid of having any thing to do with them.

II. They are told of their danger and what judgments they lay exposed to for their sins. 1. The places of their idolatry are in danger of being ruined in the first place, v. 5. *Gilgal*, the head-quarters of idolatry, *shall go into captivity*, not only its inhabitants, but its images, and *Bethel* with its golden calf *shall come to nought*. The victorious enemy shall make nothing of it, so easily shall it be spoiled, and shall bring it to nothing, so effectually shall it be spoiled. Idols were always vanity, and *things of nought*, and so they shall prove when God appears to abolish them. 2. The body of the kingdom is in danger of being ruined with them, v. 6. There is danger lest, if you seek him not in time, he *break out like a fire in the house of Joseph and devour it*; for our God is a right-

eous Judge, is a *consuming fire*, and the men of Israel, as criminals, are stubble before him; woe to those that make themselves fuel to the fire of God's wrath! It follows, *And there shall be none to quench it in Bethel*. There their idols were, and their idolatrous priests; thither they brought their sacrifices, and there they offered up their prayers. But God tells them that when the fire of his judgments should kindle upon them all the gods they served at Bethel should not be able to quench it, should not turn away the judgment, nor be any relief to them under it. Thus those that make an idol of the world will find it insufficient to protect them when God comes to reckon with them for their spiritual idolatry. 3. What they have got by oppression and extortion shall be taken from them (v. 11): "*You have built houses of hewn stone, which you thought would be lasting; but you shall not dwell in them, for your enemies shall burn them down, or possess them for themselves, or take you into captivity. You have planted pleasant vineyards, have contrived how to make them every way agreeable, and have promised yourselves many a pleasant walk in them; but you shall be forced to walk off, and shall never drink wine of them.*" The law had tenderly provided that if a man had *built a house, or planted a vineyard*, he should be at his liberty to return from the wars, Deut. xx. 5, 6. But now the necessity would be so urgent that it would not be allowed; all must go to the battle, and many of those who had lately been building and planting should fall in battle, and never enjoy what they had been labouring for. What is not honestly got is not likely to be long enjoyed.

III. They are told their duty, and have great encouragement to set about it in good earnest, and good reason. The duties here prescribed to them are godliness and honesty, seriousness in their applications to God and justice in their dealings with men; and each of these is here pressed upon them with proper arguments to enforce the exhortation.

1. They are here exhorted to be sincere and devout in their addresses to God, v. 4. God says to the *house of Israel*, *Seek you me*, and with good reason, *for should not a people seek unto their God?* Isa. viii. 19. Whither else should they go but to their protector? Israel was a *prince with God*; let his descendants *seek the Lord*, as he did, and they shall be so too. Now, in order to their doing this, they must abandon their idolatries. God is not sought truly if he be not sought exclusively, for he will endure no rivals: "*Seek you the Lord, and seek not Bethel* (v. 5), *consult not your idol-oracles, nor ask at the mouth of the priests of Bethel; seek not to the golden calf there for protection, nor bring your prayers and sacrifices any longer thither, or to Gilgal, for you forsake your own mercies* if you observe those *lying vanities*. But *seek the Lord* (v. 6, 8); enquire after him;



enquire of him; seek to know his mind as your rule, to secure his favour as your felicity." To press this exhortation we are told to consider, (1.) What we shall get by seeking God; it will be *our life*; we shall find him, and shall be happy in him. So he tells them himself (v. 4): *Seek you me, and you shall live*. So the prophet tells them (v. 6): *Seek the Lord, and you shall live*. Those that seek perishing gods shall perish with them (v. 5), but those that seek the living God shall live with him: "You shall be delivered from the killing judgments which you are threatened with; your nation shall live, shall recover from its present languishings; your souls shall live; you shall be sanctified and comforted, and made for ever blessed. *You shall live*." (2.) What a God he is whom we are to seek, v. 8, 9. [1.] He is a God of almighty power himself. The idols were impotent things, could do neither good nor evil, and therefore it was folly either to fear or trust them; but the God of Israel does every thing, and can do any thing, and therefore we ought to seek to him; he challenges our homage who has all power in his hand, and it is our interest to have him on our side. Divers proofs and instances are here given of God's power, as Creator, in the kingdom of nature, as both founding and governing that kingdom. Compare *ch. iv. 13*. First, The stars are the work of his hands; those stars which the heathens worshipped (v. 26), the *stars of your god*, those stars are God's creatures and servants. He makes the *seven stars and Orion*, two very remarkable constellations, which Amos, a herdsman, while he kept his cattle by night, had particularly observed the motions of. He made them at the first, he still makes them to be what they are to this earth and either *binds or looses the sweet influences of Pleiades and Orion*, the two constellations here mentioned. See Job xxxviii. 31; ix. 9, to which passages Amos seems here to refer, putting them in mind of those ancient discoveries of the glory of God before he was called the *God of Israel*. Secondly, The constant succession of day and night is under his direction, and is kept up by his power and providence. It is he that *turns the night* (which is dark as the *shadow of death*) *into the morning* by the rising of the sun, and by the setting of the sun *makes the day dark with night*; and the same power can, for humble penitents, easily turn affliction and sorrow into prosperity and joy, but can as easily turn the prosperity of presumptuous sinners into darkness, into utter darkness. Thirdly, The rain rises and falls as he appoints. He *calls for the waters of the sea*; out of them vapours are drawn up by the heat of the sun, which gather into clouds, and are *poured out upon the face of the earth*, to water it and make it fruitful. This was the mercy that had been *withholden from them* of late (*ch. iv. 7*); and therefore to whom should they apply but to

him who had power to give it? For all the *vanities of the heathen* could not *give rain*, nor could the *heavens* of themselves *give showers*, Jer. xiv. 22. It is God that has *made these things*; *Jehovah is his name*, the name by which the God of nature, the God of the whole earth, has made himself known to his people Israel and covenanted with them. [2.] As he is a God of almighty power himself, so he *gives strength and power unto his people* that seek him, and *renews strength* to those that had lost it, if they *wait upon him* for it; for (v. 9) he *strengthens the spoiled against the strong* to such a degree that the spoiled come *against the fortress* and make bold and brave attacks upon those that had spoiled them. This is an encouragement to the people to *seek the Lord*, that, if they do so, they shall find him able to retrieve their affairs, when they are brought to the lowest ebb; though they are the spoiled, and their enemies are the strong, if they can but engage God for them, they shall soon recruit so as the next time to be not only the aggressors, but the conquerors; they come *against the fortress*, to make reprisals and become masters of it.

2. They are here exhorted to be honest and just in their dealings with men, v. 14, 15, where observe, (1.) The duty required *Seek good, and not evil. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate*; re-establish it there, whence it has been banished, v. 7. Note, Things are not so bad but that they may be amended if the right course be taken; we must not despair but that grievances may be redressed and abuses rectified: justice may yet triumph where injustice tyrannizes. In order to this, good must be loved and sought, evil must be hated and no longer sought. We must love good principles and adhere to them, love to do good and abound in doing it, love good people, and good converse, and good duties; and, whatever good we do, we must do it from a principle of love, do it of choice and with delight. Those who thus *love good* will *seek it*, will contrive to do all the good they can, enquire for opportunities of doing it, and endeavour to do it to the utmost of their power. They will also *hate evil*, will abhor the thought of doing an unjust thing, and abstain from all appearance of it. In vain do we pretend to seek God in our devotions if we do not seek good in our whole conversations. (2.) The reasons annexed. [1.] This is the sure way to be happy ourselves and to have the continual presence of God with us: "*Seek good, and not evil, that you may live*, may escape the punishment of the evil you have sought and loved (*righteousness delivereth from death*), that you may have the favour of God, which is your life, which is better than life itself, that you may have comfort in yourselves and may live to some good purpose. You shall live, for so the Lord God of hosts shall be with you and be



your life." Note, Those that keep in the way of duty have the presence of God with them, as the *God of hosts*, a God of almighty power. "He will be with you *as you have spoken*, that is, as you have *gloried*; you shall have that really which, while you went on in unrighteous ways, you only seemed to have and boasted of as if you had." Those that truly repent and reform enter into the enjoyment of that comfort which before they had only flattered themselves with the imagination of. Or, "As you have prayed when you *sought the Lord*. Live up to your prayers, and you shall have what you pray for." [2.] 'This is the likeliest way to make the nation happy: "If you seek and love that which is good, you may contribute to the saving of the land from ruin." *It may be, the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*; though there is but a remnant left, yet, if God be gracious to that remnant, it will rise to a great nation again; and if some among them turn from sin, especially if *judgment be established in the gate*, though we cannot be certain, yet there is great probability that public affairs will take a new and happy turn, and every thing will mend if men mend their lives. Temporal promises are made with an *It may be*; and our prayers must be made accordingly.

16 Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing *shall be* in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. 17 And in all vineyards *shall be* wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. 18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end *is* it for you? the day of the LORD *is* darkness, and not light. 19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. 20 *Shall* not the day of the LORD *be* darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

Here is, I. A very terrible threatening of destruction approaching, v. 16, 17. Since they would not take the right course to obtain the favour of God, God would take an effectual course to make them feel the weight of his displeasure. The threatening is introduced with more than ordinary solemnity, to strike an awe upon them; it is not the word of the prophet only (if so, it might be made light of), but it is the *Lord Jehovah*, who has an infinite eternal being; it is the *God of hosts*, who has a boundless irresistible power, and it is *Adonai—the Lord*, who has

an absolute incontestable sovereignty, and a universal dominion; it is he who says it, who can and will make his words good, and he has said, 1. That the land of Israel shall be put in mourning, true mourning, that all places shall be filled with lamentation for the calamities coming upon them. Look into the cities, and *wailing shall be in all streets*, in the great streets, in the by-streets. Look into the country, and *they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas!* we are all undone! The lamentation shall be so great as not to be confined within doors, nor kept within the bounds of decency, but it shall be proclaimed in the streets and highways, and shall run wild. The husbandman shall be called from the plough by the calamities of his country to the natural expressions of mourning; and, because those will come short of the merits of the cause, such as are skilful of lamentation shall be called to artificial mourning, to put accents upon the lamentations of the real mourners with their *Ah, ah, ah*. Even in all vineyards, where there used to be nothing but mirth and pleasure, there shall be general wailing, when a foreign force invades the country, lays all waste, and there is no making any head against it, no weapons left but prayers and tears. 2. That the land of Israel shall be brought to ruin, and the advances of that ruin are the occasion of all this wailing: *I will pass through thee*, as the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt to destroy the first-born, but then passed over the houses of the Israelites. God's judgments had often passed by them, but now they shall pass through them, shall run them through.

II. A just and severe reproof to those who made light of these threatenings, and impudently bade defiance to the justice of God and his judgments, v. 18. Woe unto you that *desire the day of the Lord*, that really wish for times of war and confusion, as some do who have restless spirits, and long for changes, or who choose to *fish in troubled waters*, hoping to raise their families, as some had done, upon the ruins of their country; but the prophet tells them that this should be so great a desolation that nobody could get by it. Or it is spoken to those who, in their wailings and lamentations for the calamities they were in, wished they might die, and be delivered out of their misery, as Job did, with passion. The prophet shows them the folly of this. Do they know what death is to those who are unprepared for it, and how much more terrible it will be than any thing that can befall them in this life? Or, rather, it is spoken to those who speak jestingly of that day of the Lord which the prophet spoke so seriously of; they desired it, that is, they challenged it; they said, Let him do his worst; *let him make speed*, and *hasten his work*, Isa. v. 19. *Where is the promise of his coming?* 2 Pet. iii. 4. It intimates, 1. That they do not believe it. They



say that they wish it would come because they do not believe it will ever come; nor will they believe it unless they see it. 2. That they do not fear it; though they may have some belief of it, yet they have so little consideration of it, and their mind is so intent upon other things, that they are under no apprehension at all of peril from it; instead of having the conscience to dread it, they have the curiosity to desire it. In answer to this, (1.) He shows the folly of those who impudently wished for any of God's judgments, and made a jest of any of the terrors of the Lord: "*To what end is it for you that the day of the Lord should come?*" You will find it both certain and sad; not a thing to be bantered, for it is neither a thing to be questioned whether it will come or no nor a thing to be turned off with a slight when it does come. *The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light, v. 18. Shall it not be so? v. 20.* Do not your own consciences tell you that it will be so, that it will be *very dark, and no brightness in it?*" Note, *The day of the Lord* will be a dark, dismal, gloomy day to all impenitent sinners; the *day of judgment* will be so; and sometimes the day of their present trouble. And, when God makes a day dark, all the world cannot make it light. (2.) He shows the folly of those who impatiently wished for a change of God's judgments, in hopes that the next would be better and more tolerable. They desire *the day of the Lord*, in hopes to better themselves (though their hearts and lives be not amended), or, at least, to know the worst. But the prophet tells them that they know not what they ask, v. 19. *It is as if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him*, a beast of prey more cruel and ravenous than a lion, or as if a man, to escape all dangers abroad, *went into the house for security, and leaned his hand on the wall to rest himself, and there a serpent bit him.* Note, Those who are not reformed by the judgments of God will be pursued by them; and, if they escape one, another stands ready to seize them; *fear and the pit and snare* surround them, Isa. xxiv. 17, 18. It is madness therefore to *defy the day of the Lord.*

21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. 22 Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept *them*: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. 23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. 24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. 25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilder-

ness forty years, O house of Israel? 26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. 27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

The scope of these verses is to show how little God valued their shows of devotion, nay, how much he detested them, while they went on in their sins. Observe,

I. How displeasing, nay, how displeasing, their hypocritical services were to God. They had their *feast-days* at Bethel, in imitation of those at Jerusalem, in which they pretended to rejoice before God. They had their *solemn assemblies* for religious worship, in which they put on the gravity of those who *come before God as his people come, and sit before him as his people sit.* They offered to God *burnt-offerings*, to the honour of God, together with the *meat-offerings* which by the law were to be offered with them; they offered the *peace-offerings*, to implore the favour of God, and they offered them of the *fat beasts* that they had, v. 21, 22. In imitation likewise of the temple-music, they had the *noise of their songs* and the *melody of their viols* (v. 23), vocal and instrumental music, with which they praised God. With these services they hoped to make God amend for the sins they had committed, and to obtain leave to go on in sin; and therefore they were so far from being acceptable to God that they were abominable. He *hated, he despised, their feast-days*, not only despised them as no valuable services done to him, but hated them as an affront and provocation to him, as we hate to see men dissemble with us, pretend a respect for us when really they have none. Nothing more hateful, more despicable, than hypocrisy. *He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, it shall be counted a curse*, when it appears that his heart is not with him. God will not *smell in their solemn assemblies*, for there is nothing in them that is grateful to him, but a great deal that is offensive. Their sacrifices are not to him of a *sweet smelling savour*, as Noah's was, Gen. viii. 21. He will not accept them; he will not regard them, will not take any notice of them; he will not hear the melody of their viols; for, when sin is a jar in the harmony, it grates in his ears: "*Take it away,*" says God, "I cannot bear it." Now this intimates, 1. That sacrifice itself is of small account with God in comparison with moral duties; to love God and our neighbour is *better than all burnt-offering and sacrifice.* 2. That the sacrifice of the wicked is really an abomination to him, Prov. xv. 8. Dissembled piety is double iniquity, and so it will be found when, if any place in hell be hotter



than another, that will be the hypocrite's portion.

II. What it was that he required in order to the acceptableness of their sacrifices and without which no sacrifice would be acceptable (v. 24): *Let judgment run down as waters, among you, and righteousness as a mighty stream, that is, 1. "Let there be a general reformation of manners among you; let religion (God's judgment) and righteousness have their due influence upon you; let your land be watered with it, and let it bear down all the opposition of vice and profaneness; let it run wide as overflowing waters, and yet run strong as a mighty stream."* (2.) "In particular, let justice be duly administered by magistrates and rulers; let not the current of it be stopped by partiality and bribery, but let it come freely as waters do, in the natural course; let it be pure as running waters, not muddied with corruption or whatever may pervert justice; let it run like a mighty stream, and not suffer itself to be obstructed, or its course retarded, by the fear of man; let all have free access to it as to a common stream, and have benefit by it as trees planted by the rivers of waters." The great thing laid to Israel's charge was *turning judgment into wormwood* (v. 7); in that matter therefore they must reform, Zech. vii. 9. This was what God desired *more than sacrifices*, Hos. vi. 6; 1 Sam. xv. 22.

III. What little stress God had laid upon the law of sacrifices, though it was his own law, in comparison with the moral precepts (v. 25): "*Did you offer unto me sacrifices in the wilderness forty years?* No, you did not." For the greatest part of that time sacrifice was very much neglected, because of the unsettledness of their state; after the second year, the passover was not kept till they came into Canaan, and other institutions were in like manner intermitted; and yet, because God will have mercy and not sacrifice, he never imputed the omission to them as their fault, but continued his care of them and kindness to them: it was not that, but their murmuring and unbelief, for which God was displeased with them. He that so owned his people, though they did not sacrifice, when in other things they kept close to him, will certainly disown them, though they do sacrifice, if in other things they depart from him. But, though ritual sacrifices may thus be dispensed with, spiritual sacrifices will not; even justice and honesty will not excuse for the want of prayer and praise, a broken heart and the love of God. Stephen quotes this passage (Acts vii. 42), to show the Jews that they ought not to think it strange that the ceremonial law was repealed when from the beginning it was comparatively made light of. Compare Jer. vii. 22, 23.

IV. What little reason they had to expect that their sacrifices should be acceptable to God, when they and their fathers had been

all along addicted to the worship of other gods. So some take v. 25, "*Did you offer to me sacrifices*, that is, to me only? No, and therefore not at all to me acceptably;" for the law of worshipping the Lord our God is, *Him only we must serve*. "*But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch* (v. 26), little shrines that you made to carry about with you, pocket-idols for your private superstition, when you durst not be seen to do it publicly. You have had the images of your *Moloch—your king*" (probably representing the sun, that sits king among the heavenly bodies), "*and Chiun, or Remphan*" (as Stephen calls it, Acts vii. 43, after the LXX.), which, it is supposed, represented Saturn, the highest of the seven planets. The worship of the sun, moon, and stars, was the most ancient, most general, and most plausible idolatry. They *made to themselves the star of their God*, some particular star which they took to be their god, or the name of which they gave to their god. This idolatry Israel was from the beginning prone to (Deut. iv. 19); and those that retain an affection for false gods cannot expect the favour of the true God.

V. What punishment God would inflict upon them for their persisting in idolatry (v. 27): *I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus*. They were led captive by Satan into idolatry, and therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters, and hurried them into a strange land, since they were so fond of strange gods. They were carried *beyond Damascus*. Their captivity by the Assyrians was far beyond that by the Syrians; for, if less judgments do not work that for which they were sent, God will send greater. Or the captivity of Israel under Shalmaneser was far beyond that of Damascus under Tiglath-pileser, and much more grievous and destructive, which was foretold ch. i. 5. For, as the sins of God's professing people are greater than the sins of others, so it may be expected that their punishments will be proportionable. We find the spoil of Damascus and that of Samaria carried off together by the king of Assyria, Isa. viii. 4. Stephen reads it, *I will carry you away beyond Babylon* (Acts vii. 43), further than Judah shall be carried, so far further as not to return. And, to make this sentence appear both the more certain and the more dreadful, he that passes it calls himself *the Lord, whose name is, The God of hosts*, and who is therefore able to execute the sentence, having hosts at command.

#### CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have, I. A sinful people studying to put a slight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear trivial, confiding in their privileges and pre-eminences above other nations (ver. 2, 3), and their power (ver. 13), and wholly addicted to their pleasures, ver. 4–6. II. A serious prophet studying to put a weight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear terrible, by setting forth the severity of those judgments that were coming upon these sensualists (ver. 7), God's abhorring them, and punishing them and theirs to death (ver. 8–11), and bringing utter desolation upon them, since they would not be wrought upon by the methods he had taken for their conviction, ver. 12–14.



**W**OE to them *that are* at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, *which are* named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! 2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: *be they* better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? 3 Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; 4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; 5 That chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; 6 That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. 7 Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

The first words of the chapter are the contents of these verses; but they sound very strangely, and contrary to the sentiments of a vain world: *Woe to those that are at ease!* We are ready to say, *Happy are those that are at ease*, that neither feel any trouble nor fear any, that lie soft and warm, and lay nothing to heart; and wise we think are those that do so, that bathe themselves in the delights of sense and care not how the world goes. Those are looked upon as doing well for themselves that do well for their bodies and make much of them; but against them this woe is denounced, and we are here told what their ease is, and what the woe is.

I. Here is a description of their pride, security, and sensuality, for which God would reckon with them.

1. They were vainly conceited of their own dignities, and thought those would secure them from the judgments threatened and be their defence against the wrath both of God and man. (1.) Those that dwelt in Zion thought that was honour and protection enough for them, and they might there be quiet from all fear of evil, because it was a strong city, well fortified both by nature and art (we read of Zion's *strong-holds* and her *bulwarks*), and because it was a royal city, where were set the thrones of the house of David (it was the head-city of Judah, and therefore truly great), and especially because it was the holy city, where the temple was, and the testimony of Israel; those that

dwelt there doubted not but that God's sanctuary would be a sanctuary to them and would shelter them from his judgments. The temple of the Lord are these, Jer. vii. 4. They are *haughty because of the holy mountain*, Zeph. iii. 11. Note, Many are puffed up with pride, and rocked asleep in carnal security, by their church-privileges, and the place they have in Zion. (2.) Those that dwelt in the mountain of Samaria, though it was not a holy hill, like that of Zion, yet they trusted in it, because it was the metropolis of a potent kingdom, and perhaps, in imitation of Jerusalem, was the headquarters of its religion; and by lapse of time the hill of Shemer became with them in as good repute as the hill of Zion ever was. They hoped for salvation from these hills and mountains. (3.) Both these two kingdoms valued themselves upon their relation to Israel, that prince with God, which they looked upon as making them the *chief of the nations*, more ancient and honourable than any of them; the *first-fruits of the nations* (so the word is), dedicated to God and sanctifying the whole harvest. The house of Israel came to them, that is, was divided into those kingdoms, of which Zion and Samaria were the mother cities. Those that were at ease were the princes and rulers, the great men, that were *chief of the nations*, chief of those two kingdoms, and to whom, having their residence in Zion and Samaria, the whole house of Israel applied for judgment. Note, It is hard to be great and not to be proud. Great nations and great men are apt to overvalue themselves, and to overlook their neighbours, because they think they a little overtop them. But, for a check to their pride and security, the prophet bids them take notice of those cities that were within the compass of their knowledge, that had been as illustrious in their time as ever Zion or Samaria was, and yet were destroyed, v. 2. "Go to Calneh (which was an ancient city built by Nimrod, Gen. x. 10), and see what has become of that; it is now in ruins; so is Hamath the great, one of the chief cities of Syria. Sennacherib boasts of *destroying the gods of Hamath*. Gath was likewise made desolate by Hazael, and not long ago, 2 Kings xii. 17. Now were they better than these kingdoms of Judah and Israel? Yes, they were, and their border greater than your border, so that they had more reason than you to be confident of their own safety; yet you see what has become of them, and dare you be secure? Art thou better than populous No?" Nah. iii. 8. Note, The examples of others' ruin forbid us to be secure.

2. They persisted in their wicked courses upon a presumption that they should never be called to an account for them (v. 3): "You put far away the evil day, the day of reckoning, as a thing that shall never come, or you look upon it as at such a distance



that it makes no impression at all upon you; you *put it far away*, and think you can still put it yet further, and adjourn it *de die in diem—from day to day*, and therefore you *cause the seat of violence to draw near*; you venture upon all acts of injustice and oppression, and have *fellowship with the throne of iniquity, which frames mischief by a law*, Ps. xciv. 20. You cause that to come near, as if that would be your protection from these judgments which really ripens you for them." Note, *Therefore* men take sin to be near them, because they take judgment to be far off from them; but those deceive themselves who thus mock God.

3. They indulged themselves in all manner of sensual pleasures and delights, v. 4—6. These Israelites were perfect epicures and slaves to their appetites. Their dignities (in consideration of which they ought to have been examples of self-denial and mortification), they thought, would justify them in their sensuality; the gains of their oppression and violence, they thought, would bear the charge of it; and they put the evil day at a distance, that that might give them no disturbance in it. That which they are here charged with is not in itself sinful (these things might be soberly and moderately used), but they placed their happiness in the gratification of their carnal appetites; and though they were men in office, that had business to mind, they gave themselves up to their pleasures, spent their time in them, and threw away their thoughts, and cares, and estates upon them. They were in these enjoyments as in their element. Their hearts were upon them; they exceeded all bounds in them, and this at a time when God in his providence was calling them to *weeping and mourning*, Isa. xxii. 12, 13. When they were under guilt and wrath, and the judgments of God were ready to break in upon them, they called for *wine and strong drink*, presuming that *to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant* (Isa. lvi. 12), thus walking contrary to God and setting his justice at defiance. (1.) They were extravagant in their furniture. Nothing would serve them but *beds of ivory* to sleep upon, or to sit on at their meat, when sackcloth and ashes would have become them better. (2.) They were lazy, and humoured themselves in the love of ease. They did not only lie down, but *stretched themselves* upon their couches, when they should have stirred up themselves to their business; they were willingly slothful, and took a pride in doing nothing; they *abound in superfluities* (so the margin reads it), when many of their poor brethren wanted necessities. (3.) They were nice and curious in their diet, must have every thing of the best and abundance of it: They ate *the lambs out of the flock* (lambs by wholesale) and the *calves out of the midst of the stall*, the fattest they could lay their hand on; and these perhaps not out of their

own flock and their own stall, but taken by oppression from the poor. (4.) They were merry and jovial, and diverted themselves at their feasts with music and singing: They *chant to the sound of the viol*, sing and play in concert, and they invent new-fashioned *instruments of music*, striving herein, more than in any thing else, to excel their ancestors; they set their wits on work to contrive how to please their fancy. Some men never show their ingenuity but in their luxury; on that they bestow all their faculty of invention and contrivance. They invent *instruments of music, like David*, entertain themselves with that which formerly used to be the entertainment of kings only. Or it intimates their profaneness in their mirth; they mimicked the temple-music, and made a jest of that, because, it may be, it was old-fashioned, and they took a pride in bantering it as the Babylonians did when they urged the captives to sing to them the *songs of Zion*; such was Belshazzar's profaneness when he drank wine in temple-bowls, and such is theirs that sing vain and loose songs in psalm-tunes, on purpose to ridicule a divine institution. (5.) They drank to excess, and never thought they could pour down enough: They *drink wine in bowls*, not in glasses, or cups (as Jer. xxxv. 5); they hate to be stinted, and must have large draughts, and therefore make use of vessels that they can steal a draught out of. (6.) They affected the strongest perfumes: They *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*, to please the smell, and to make them more in love with their own bodies, and to guard against those pre-sages of putrefaction which they carry about with them while they live. No ordinary ointments would serve their turn; they must have the chief, such as were far-fetched and dear-bought, when cheaper would have served as well.

4. They had no concern at all for the interests of the church of God, and of the nation, that were sinking and going to decay: They *are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*; the church of God, including both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (which are called *Joseph*, Ps. lxxx. 1), was in distress, invaded, insulted, and broken in upon. As to their own kingdom which they were entrusted with the government of, the affairs of which they were the directors of, the peace of which they were the conservators of, great breaches were made upon it, upon its peace and welfare; and they were so besotted that they were not aware of them, so indulgent of their pleasures that they never laid them to heart, and had such an aversion to the thing called business that they were in no care or concern to get them repaired. It is all one to them whether the nation sink or swim, so that they can but lie at ease and live in pleasure. Particular persons that belonged to Joseph were in affliction, and they took no cognizance of their case. of the



wrongs and hardships they sustained and the troubles they were in, nor took any care to relieve them, and right them, contrary to the temper of holy Job, who, when he was in prosperity, *wept with him that was in misery* and his soul was grieved for the poor, Job xxx. 25. Some think that, in calling the afflicted church *Joseph*, there is an allusion to the story of Pharaoh's butler, who, when he was preferred to give the cup again into his master's hand, *remembered not Joseph, but forgot him*, Gen. xl. 21, 23. Thus they *drank wine in bowls*, but were not grieved for the affliction of *Joseph*. Note, Those are commonly careless of the troubles of others who are set upon their own pleasures; and it is a great offence to God when his church is in affliction and we are not grieved for it, nor lay it to heart.

II. Here is the doom passed upon them (v. 7): *Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive*, and shall fall into all the miseries that attend captives; and the banquet of those that stretched themselves upon their couches shall be removed. Their plenty shall be taken from them, and they from it, because they made it the food and fuel of their lusts. 1. Those who lived in luxury shall lose even their liberty; and by being brought into servitude shall be justly punished for the abuse of their dignity and dominion. 2. Those who trusted in the delights and pleasures of their own land shall be carried away into a strange land, and so made ashamed of their pride and confidence; they shall go captive. 3. Those who placed their happiness in the pleasures of sense, and set their hearts upon them, shall be deprived of those pleasures; their banquet shall be removed, and they shall know what it is to fare hard. 4. Those who stretched themselves shall be made to contract themselves, and to come into a less compass. 5. Those who put the evil day far from them shall find it nearer to them than it is to others; *those shall go captive with the first* who flattered themselves with hopes that if trouble did come they should be the last who should be seized by it. Those are ripening apace for trouble themselves who lay not to heart the troubles of others and of the church of God. Those who give themselves to mirth, when God calls them to mourning, will find it is a sin that shall not go unpunished, Isa. xxii. 14.

8 The Lord God hath sworn by himself, saith the Lord the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein. 9 And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. 10 And a man's uncle shall take him up, and

he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, *Is there yet any with thee?* And he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord. 11 For, behold, the Lord commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts. 12 Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock: 13 Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? 14 But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the Lord the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness.

In the former part of the chapter we had these secure Israelites loading themselves with pleasures, as if they could never be made merry enough; here we have God loading them with punishments, as if they could never be made miserable enough. And observe,

I. How strongly this burden is bound on, not to be shaken off by their presumption and security; for it is bound by the Lord the God of hosts, by his mighty, his almighty, hand, which none can resist; it is bound with an oath, which puts the sentence past revocation: *The Lord God has sworn, and he will not repent*, and, since he could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself. How dreadful, how miserable, is the case of those whose ruin, whose eternal ruin, God himself has sworn, who can execute his purpose and cannot alter it!

II. How heavily this burden lies! Let us see the particulars. 1. God will abhor and abandon them, and that implies misery enough, all misery: *I abhor the excellency of Jacob*, all that which they are proud of, and value themselves upon, and for which they call and count themselves the chief of the nations. Their visible church-membership, and the privileges of that, their temple, altar, and priesthood, these were, more than any thing, the excellencies of Jacob; but, when these were profaned and polluted by sin, God abhorred them; he hated and despised them, ch. v. 21. Note, God abhors that form of godliness which hypocrites keep up, while they abhor the power of it. And if he abhors their temple, for the iniquity of

that, no marvel that he hates their palaces, for the injustice and oppression he finds there. Note, That creature which we take such a complacency and put such a confidence in as to make it a rival with God is thereby made abominable to him. He *hates the palaces* of sinners, for the sake of the wickedness of those who dwell therein. Prov. iii. 33, *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.* And, if God abhor them, immediately it follows, He will *deliver up the city with all that is therein*, deliver it up into the hands of the enemy, that will lay it waste, and make a prey of all its wealth. Note, Those that are abhorred and abandoned of God are undone to all intents and purposes. 2. There shall be a great and general mortality among them (v. 9): *If there remain ten men in one house*, that have escaped the sword of the enemy, yet they shall be met with another way; *they shall all die* by famine or pestilence. In the most sickly times, if there be ten in a house, one may hope that at least the one-half of them will escape, according to the proportion of two in a bed, *one taken and the other left*; but here not one of ten shall live to bury the rest. Another instance of the greatness of the mortality is (v. 10) that the nearest relations of the dead shall be forced with their own hands to wind up their bodies, and bury them, for want of other hands to be employed in it; that is all that the *next of kin*, to whom the right of redemption belongs, can do for them, and with great reluctance will they do that. It intimates that the young people shall be cut off soonest; for the uncle that survives is, ordinarily, the senior relation. "When the uncle comes with the sexton (or him that burns), to bring out the bones out of the house, he shall say to him that he sees next about the house, 'Is there yet any with thee? Are there any left alive?' And he shall say, 'No, this is the last; now the whole family is cut off by death, and neither root nor branch remains.'" But that which makes this judgment the more grievous is that their hearts seem to be hardened under it. "When he that is found by the sides of the house begin to enter into discourse with those that are carrying off the dead, they shall say, 'Hold thy tongue; do not stand preaching to us about the hand of Providence in this calamity, for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord; God is so angry with us that there is no speaking to him; he is so extreme to mark what we do amiss that we dare not so much as make mention of his name.'" Thus the foolishness of men perverts their way, and brings them into distress, and then their heart frets against the Lord. Even then they will not take notice of his hand, nor suffer those about them to do it. Perhaps it was forbidden by some of the idolatrous kings to make mention of the name of *Jehovah*, as by the law of Moses it was for-

bidden to make mention of the names of the heathen-gods: "We may not do it without incurring the penalty." Note, Those hearts are wretchedly hardened indeed that will not be brought to make mention of God's name, and to worship him, when the hand of God has gone out against them, and when, as here, sickness and death are in their families. Thus those *heap up wrath who cry not when God binds them*. 3. Their houses shall be destroyed, v. 11. *God will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts*; they shall both be cracked so as to lose their beauty and strength, and to be hastening towards a fall. 'The princes' palaces are not above the rebuke of divine justice, nor the poor men's cottages beneath it; neither shall escape. When sin has marked them for ruin God will find ways to bring it about. It is by order from him that breaches are made.

III. How justly they are thus burdened. If we understand the matter aright, we shall say, *The Lord is righteous*. 1. The methods used for their reformation had been all fruitless and ineffectual (v. 12): *Shall horses run upon the rock, to hurl or harrow the ground there? Or will one plough there with oxen?* No, for there will be no profit to countervail the pains. God had sent them his prophets, to break up their fallow-ground; but they found them as hard and inflexible as the rock, rough and rugged, and they could do no good with them, nor work upon them, and therefore they shall not attempt it any more. They will not be reclaimed, and therefore shall not be reformed, but quite abandoned. Note, Those who will not be cultivated as fields and vineyards shall be rejected as barren rocks and deserts, Heb. vi. 7, 8. 2. They had abused their power to the wrong and oppression of many, whose injured cause the sovereign Judge would not only right, but revenge: *You have turned judgment into gall*, which is nauseous, and *the fruit of righteousness into hemlock*, which is noxious; it would make one sick to see how those that were entrusted with the administration of public justice bore down equity with that power with which they ought to have defended and supported it, and so turned its own artillery against itself. Note, When our services of God are soured with sin his providences will justly be embittered to us. 3. They had set the judgments of God at defiance, and, confiding in their own strength, thought themselves a match for Omnipotence, v. 13. They rejoiced in a thing of nought, pleased themselves with a fancy that no evil should befall them, though they had no ground at all for that confidence, nothing to trust to that would bear any weight. They said, "Have we not taken to us horns; have we not arrived to great dignity and dominion, have we not pushed down our enemies and pushed on our victories, and this by our own strength, our own skill and courage, our own wealth



and military force? Who then need we be afraid of? Who then need we make court to? Not God himself." Note, Prosperity and success commonly make men secure and haughty; and those that have done much think they can do any thing, any thing without God, nay, any thing against him. But those who trust in their own strength rejoice in *a thing of nought*, and so they will find. Probably they did not say this with their lips, *totidem verbis—in so many words*, but it was the language of their hearts and of their actions, both which God understands.

IV. How easily and effectually this burden shall be brought upon them, *v. 14*. He that brings it upon them is *the Lord the God of hosts*, who both may do and can do what he pleases, who has all creatures at his command, and who, when he has work to do, will not be at a loss for instruments to do it with; though they are the house of Israel, yet he will *raise up against them a nation* which they feared not, but had many a time hoped in, even the Assyrians, and this nation shall *afflict them*, bring them into straits, and put them to pain, from the *entering in of Hamath*, in the north, *to the river of the wilderness*, the river of Egypt, Sihor or Nile, in the south. The whole nation has shared in the iniquity, and therefore must expect to share in the calamity. Note, When men are in any way instruments of affliction to us we must see God raising them up against us, for they are his hand—the rod, the sword, in his hand. The Lord has bidden Shimei curse David.

## CHAP. VII.

In this chapter we have, I. God contending with Israel, by the judgments brought on their land. 1. They are threatened with less judgments, but are relieved, and the judgments turned away at the prayer of Amos, *ver. 1–6*. 2. God's patience is at length worn out by their obstinacy, and they are rejected, and sentenced to utter ruin, *ver. 7–9*. II. Israel contending with God, by the opposition given to his prophet. 1. Amaziah informs against Amos (*ver. 10, 11*) and does what he can to rid the country of him as a public nuisance, *ver. 12, 13*. 2. Amos justifies himself in what he did as a prophet (*ver. 14, 15*) and denounces the judgments of God against Amaziah his prosecutor (*ver. 16, 17*); for, when the contest is between God and man, it is easy to foresee, it is very easy to foretell, who will come off with the worst of it.

**T**HUS hath the Lord God showed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, *it was* the latter growth after the king's mowings. 2 And it came to pass, *that* when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he *is* small. 3 The Lord repented for this: it shall not be, saith the Lord. 4 Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep,

and did eat up a part. 5 Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he *is* small. 6 The Lord repented for this: this also shall not be, saith the Lord God. 7 Thus he showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall *made* by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. 8 And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more: 9 And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

We here see that God bears long, but that he will not bear always, with a provoking people; both these God here showed the prophet: *Thus hath the Lord God showed me, v. 1, 4, 7*. He showed him what was present, foreshowed him what was to come, gave him the knowledge both of what he did and of what he designed; for the *Lord God reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets, ch. iii. 7*.

I. We have here two instances of God's sparing mercy, remembered in the midst of judgment, the narratives of which are so much like one another that they will be best considered together, and very considerable they are.

1. God is here coming forth against this sinful nation, first by one judgment and then by another. (1.) He begins with the judgment of famine. The prophet saw this in vision. He saw God *forming grasshoppers, or locusts*, and bringing them up upon the land, to eat up the fruits of it, and so to strip it of its beauty and starve its inhabitants, *v. 1*. God formed these grasshoppers, not only as they were his creatures (and much of the wisdom and power of God appears in the formation of minute animals, as much in the structure of an ant as of an elephant), but as they were instruments of his wrath. God is said to *frame evil* against a sinful people, *Jer. xviii. 11*. These grasshoppers were framed on purpose to *eat up the grass of the land*; and vast numbers of them were prepared accordingly. They were sent in *the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth, after the king's mowings*. See here how the judgment was mitigated by the mercy that went before it. God could have sent these insects to eat up the grass at the beginning of the first growth, in the spring, when the grass was most needed, was most plentiful, and was the best in its kind; but God suffered that to grow, and suffered



them to gather it in; the king's mowings were safely housed, for *the king himself is served from the field* (Eccl. v. 9), and could as ill be without his mowings as without any other branch of his revenues. Uzziah, who was now king of Judah, *loved husbandry*, 2 Chron. xxvi. 10. But the grasshoppers were commissioned to eat up only the *latter growth* (the edgrew we call it in the country), the after-grass, which is of little value in comparison with the former. The mercies which God gives us, and continues to us, are more numerous and more valuable than those heremoves from us, which is a good reason why we should be thankful and not complain. The remembrance of the mercies of the former growth should make us submissive to the will of God when we meet with disappointments in the latter growth. The prophet, in vision, saw this judgment prevailing far. These grasshoppers *ate up the grass of the land*, which should have been for the cattle, which the owners must of course suffer by. Some understand this figuratively of a wasting destroying army brought upon them. In the days of Jeroboam the kingdom of Israel began to recover itself from the desolations it had been under in the former reigns (2 Kings xiv. 25); the latter growth shot up, after the mowings of the kings of Syria, which we read of 2 Kings xiii. 3. And then God commissioned the king of Assyria with an army of caterpillars to come upon them and lay them waste, that nation spoken of *ch. vi. 14*, which afflicted them *from the entering of Hamath to the river of the wilderness*, which seems to refer to 2 Kings xiv. 25, where Jeroboam is said to have restored their coast *from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain*. God can bring all to ruin when we think all is in some good measure repaired. (2.) He proceeds to the judgment of fire, to show that he has many arrows in his quiver, many ways of humbling a sinful nation (*v. 4*): *The Lord God called to contend by fire*. He contended, for God's judgments upon a people are his controversies with them; in them he prosecutes his action against them; and his controversies are neither causeless nor groundless. He *called to contend*; he did by his prophets give them notice of his controversy, and drew up a declaration, setting forth the meaning of it. Or he called for his angels, or other ministers of his justice, that were to be employed in it. A fire was kindled among them, by which perhaps is meant a great drought (the heat of the sun, which should have warmed the earth, scorched it, and burnt up the roots of the grass which the locusts had eaten the spires of), or a raging fever, which was as a fire in their bones, which devoured and ate up multitudes, or lightning, fire from heaven, which consumed their houses, as Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed (*ch. iv. 11*), or it was the burning

of their cities, either by accident or by the hand of the enemy, for fire and sword used to go together; thus were the towns wasted, as the country was by the grasshoppers. This fire, which God called for, did terrible execution; it *devoured the great deep*, as the fire that fell from heaven on Elijah's altar licked up the water that was in the trench. Though the water designed for the stopping and quenching of this fire was as the water of the great deep, yet it devoured it; for who, or what, can stand before a fire kindled by the wrath of God? It *did eat up a part*, a great part, of the cities where it was sent; or it was as the fire at Taberah, which *consumed the outermost parts of the camp* (Num. xi. 1); when some were overthrown others were *as brands plucked out of the fire*. All deserved to be devoured, but it ate up only a part, for God does not stir up all his wrath.

2. The prophet goes forth to meet him in the way of his judgments, and by prayer seeks to turn away his wrath, *v. 2*. When he saw, in vision, what dreadful work these caterpillars made, that they had eaten up in a manner *all the grass of the land* (he foresaw they would do so, if suffered to go on), then he said, *O Lord God! forgive, I beseech thee* (*v. 2*); *cease, I beseech thee*, *v. 5*. He that foretold the judgment in his preaching to the people, yet deprecated it in his intercessions for them. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*. It was the business of prophets to pray for those to whom they prophesied, and so to make it appear that though they denounced they did not *desire the woeful day*. Therefore God showed his prophets the evils coming, that they might befriend the people, not only by warning them, but by praying for them, and *standing in the gap*, to turn away God's wrath, as Moses, that great prophet, often did. Now observe here,

(1.) The prophet's prayer: *O Lord God!*

[1.] *Forgive, I beseech thee*, and take away the sin, *v. 2*. He sees sin at the bottom of the trouble, and therefore concludes that the pardon of sin must be at the bottom of the deliverance, and prays for that in the first place. Note, Whatever calamity we are under, personal or public, the forgiveness of sin is that which we should be most earnest with God for. [2.] *Cease, I beseech thee*, and take away the judgment; cease the fire, cease the controversy; *cause thy anger towards us to cease*. This follows upon the forgiveness of sin. Take away the cause and the effect will cease. Note, Those whom God contends with will soon find what need they have to cry for a cessation of arms; and there are hopes that though God has begun, and proceeded far, in his controversy, yet it may be obtained.

(2.) The prophet's plea to enforce this prayer: *By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?* *v. 2*. And it is repeated (*v. 5*) and yet no vain repetition. Christ, *in his agony*,



prayed earnestly, *saying the same words*, again and again. [1.] It is Jacob that he is interceding for, the professing people of God, called by his name, calling on his name, the seed of Jacob, his chosen, and in covenant with him. It is Jacob's case that is in this prayer spread before the God of Jacob. [2.] *Jacob is small*, very small already, weakened and brought low by former judgments; and therefore, if these come, he will be quite ruined and brought to nothing. The people are few; *the dust of Jacob*, which was once innumerable, is now soon counted. Those few are feeble (it is *the worm Jacob*, Isa. xli. 14); they are unable to help themselves or one another. Sin will soon make a great people small, will diminish the numerous, impoverish the plenteous, and weaken the courageous. [3.] *By whom shall he arise?* He has fallen, and cannot help himself up, and he has no friend to help him, none to raise him, unless the hand of God do it; what will become of him, then, if the hand that should raise him be stretched out against him? Note, When the state of God's church is very low and very helpless it is proper to be recommended by our prayers to God's pity.

3. God graciously lets fall his controversy, in answer to the prophet's prayer, once and again (v. 3): *The Lord repented for this*. He did not change his mind, for he is in one mind and who can turn him? But he changed his way, took another course, and determined to deal in mercy and not in wrath. He said, *It shall not be*. And again (v. 6), *This also shall not be*. The caterpillars were countermanded, were remanded; a stop was put to the progress of the fire, and thus a reprieve was granted. See the power of prayer, of effectual fervent prayer, and how much it avails, what great things it prevails for. A stop has many a time been put to a judgment by making supplication to the Judge. This was not the first time that Israel's life was begged, and so saved. See what a blessing praying people, praying prophets, are to a land, and therefore how highly they ought to be valued. Ruin would many a time have broken in if they had not stood in the breach, and made good the pass. See how ready, how swift, God is to show mercy, how he *waits to be gracious*. Amos moves for a reprieve, and obtains it, because God inclines to grant it and looks about to see if there be any that will intercede for it, Isa. lix. 16. Nor are former reprieves objected against further instances of mercy, but are rather encouragements to pray and hope for them. This also shall not be, any more than that. It is the glory of God that he *multiplies to pardon*, that he spares, and forgives, to more than seventy times seven times.

II. We have here the rejection of those at last who had been often reprieved and yet never reclaimed, reduced to straits and yet

never reduced to their God and their duty. This is represented to the prophet by a vision (v. 7, 8) and an express prediction of utter ruin, v. 9.

1. The vision is of a *plumb-line*, a line with a plummet at the end of it, such as masons and bricklayers use to run up a wall by, that they may work it straight and true, and by rule. (1.) Israel was a wall, a strong wall, which God himself had reared, as a bulwark, or wall of defence, to his sanctuary, which he set up among them. The Jewish church says of herself (Cant. viii. 10), *I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers*. This wall was made by a *plumb-line*, very exact and firm. So happy was its constitution, so well compacted, and every thing so well ordered according to the model; it had long stood fast as a wall of brass. But, (2.) God now *stands upon* this wall, not to hold it up, but to tread it down, or, rather, to consider what he should do with it. He *stands upon it with a plumb-line in his hand*, to take measure of it, that it may appear to be a bowing, bulging wall. *Recti est index sui et obliqui*—This *plumb-line* would discover where it was crooked. Thus God would bring the people of Israel to the trial, would discover their wickedness, and show wherein they erred; and he would likewise bring his judgments upon them according to equity, would set a *plumb-line in the midst of them*, to mark how far their wall must be pulled down, as David measured the Moabites with a line (2 Sam. viii. 2) *to put them to death*. And, when God is coming to the ruin of a people, he is said to *lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet*; for when he punishes it is with exactness. It is now determined: "*I will not again pass by them any more*; they shall not be spared and reprieved as they have been; their punishment shall not be *turned away*," ch. i. 3. Note, God's patience, which has long been sinned against, will at length be sinned away; and the time will come when those that have been spared often shall be no longer spared. *My spirit shall not always strive*. After frequent reprieves, yet a day of execution will come.

2. The prediction is of utter ruin, v. 9. (1.) The body of the people shall be destroyed, with all those things that were their ornament and defence. They are here called *Isaac* as well as *Israel*, *the house of Isaac* (v. 16), some think in allusion to the signification of Isaac's name; it is *laughter*; they shall become a jest among all their neighbours; their neighbours shall *laugh at them*. The desolation shall fasten upon their high places and their sanctuaries, either their *castles* or their *temples*, both built on high places. Their castles they thought safe, and their temples sacred as sanctuaries. These shall be *laid waste*, to punish them for their idolatry and to make them ashamed of their carnal confidences, which were the two things for which

God had a controversy with them. When these were made desolate they might read their sin and folly in their punishment. (2.) The royal family shall sink first, as an earnest of the ruin of the whole kingdom: *I will rise against the house of Jeroboam*, Jeroboam the second, who was now king of the ten tribes; his family was extirpated in his son Zecharias, who was *slain with the sword before the people*, by Shallum who *conspired against him*, 2 Kings xv. 10. How unrighteous soever the instruments were, God was righteous, and in them God rose up against that idolatrous family. Even king's houses will be no shelter against the sword of God's wrath.

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. 12 Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: 13 But prophesy not again any more at Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court. 14 Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: 15 And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. 16 Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not *thy word* against the house of Isaac. 17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

One would have expected, 1. That what we met with in the former part of the chapter would awaken the people to repentance, when they saw that they were reprieved in order that they might have *space to repent* and that they could not obtain a pardon unless they did repent. 2. That it would endear the prophet Amos to them, who had not only shown his good-will to them in

praying against the judgments that invaded them, but had prevailed to turn away those judgments, which, if they had had any sense of gratitude, would have gained him an interest in their affections. But it fell out quite contrary; they continue impenitent, and the next news we hear of Amos is that he is persecuted. Note, As it is the praise of great saints that they pray for those that are enemies to them, so it is the shame of many great sinners that they are enemies to those who pray for them, Ps. xxxv. 13, 15; cix. 4. We have here,

I. The malicious information brought to the king against the prophet Amos, v. 10, 11. The informer was *Amaziah the priest of Bethel*, the chief of the priests that ministered to the golden calf there, the *president of Bethel* (so some read it), that had the principal hand in civil affairs there. He complained against Amos, not only because he prophesied without license from him, but because he prophesied against his altars, which would soon be deserted and demolished if Amos's preaching could but gain credit. Thus the shrine-makers at Ephesus hated Paul, because his preaching tended to spoil their trade. Note, Great pretenders to sanctity are commonly the worst enemies to those who are really sanctified. Priests have been the most bitter persecutors. Amaziah brings an information to Jeroboam against Amos. Observe, 1. The crime he is charged with is no less than treason: "*Amos has conspired against thee*, to depose and murder thee; he aims at succeeding thee, and therefore is taking the most effectual way to weaken thee. He sows the seeds of sedition in the hearts of the good subjects of the king, and makes them disaffected to him and his government, that he may draw them by degrees from their allegiance; upon this account *the land is not able to bear his words*." It is slyly insinuated to the king that the country was exasperated against him, and it is given in as their sense that his preaching was intolerable, and such as nobody could be reconciled to, such as the times would by no means bear, that is, the men of the times would not. Both the impudence of his supposed treason, and the bad influence it would have upon the country, are intimated in that part of the charge, that he conspired against the king in the midst of the house of Israel. Note, It is no new thing for the accusers of the brethren to misrepresent them as enemies to the king and kingdom, as traitors to their prince and troublers of the land, when really they are the best friends to both. And it is common for designing men to assert that as the sense of the country which is far from being so. And yet here, I doubt, it was too true, that the people could not bear plain dealing any more than the priests. 2. The words laid in the indictment for the support of this charge (v. 11). *Amos says* (and they have



witnesses ready to prove it) *Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be led away captive*; and hence they infer that he is an enemy to his king and country, and not to be tolerated. See the malice of Amaziah; he does not tell the king how Amos had interceded for Israel, and by his intercession had turned away first one judgment and then another, and did not let fall his intercession till he saw the decree had gone forth; he does not tell him that these threatenings were conditional, and that he had often assured them that if they would repent and reform the ruin should be prevented. Nay, it was not true that he said, *Jeroboam shall die by the sword*, nor did he so die (2 Kings xiv. 28), but that God would *rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword*, v. 9. God's prophets and ministers have often had occasion to make David's complaint (Ps. lvi. 5), *Every day they wrest my words*. But shall it be made the watchman's crime, when he sees the sword coming, to give warning to the people, that they may get themselves secured? or the physician's crime to tell his patient of the danger of his disease, that he may use means for the cure of it? What enemies are foolish men to themselves, to their own peace, to their best friends! It does not appear that Jeroboam took any notice of this information; perhaps he revered a prophet, and stood more in awe of the divine authority than Amaziah his priest did.

II. The method he used to persuade Amos to withdraw and quit the country (v. 12, 13); when he could not gain his point with the king to have Amos imprisoned, banished, or put to death, or at least to have him frightened into silence or flight, he tried what he could do by fair means to get rid of him; he insinuated himself into his acquaintance, and with all the arts of wheedling endeavoured to persuade him to go and prophesy in the *land of Judah*, and not at Bethel. He owns him to be a seer, and does not pretend to enjoin him silence, but suggests to him,

1. That Bethel was not a proper place for him to exercise his ministry in, for it was *the king's chapel*, or *sanctuary*, where he had his idols and their altars and priests; and it was *the king's court*, or *the house of the kingdom*, where the royal family resided and where were set the thrones of judgment; and therefore *prophesy not any more here*. And why not? (1.) Because Amos is too plain and blunt a preacher for the court and the king's chapel. Those that wear silk and fine clothing, and speak silken soft words, are fit for king's palaces. (2.) Because the worship that is in the king's chapel will be a continual vexation and trouble to Amos; let him therefore get far enough from it, and what the eye sees not the heart grieves not for. (3.) Because it was not fit that the king and his house should be affronted in their own court and chapel by the reproofs

and threatenings which Amos was continually teasing them with in the name of the Lord; as if it were the prerogative of the prince, and the privilege of the peers, when they are running headlong upon a precipice, not to be told of their danger. (4.) Because he could not expect any countenance or encouragement there, but, on the contrary, to be bantered and ridiculed by some and to be threatened and brow-beaten by others; however, he could not think to make any converts there, or to persuade any from that idolatry which was supported by the authority and example of the king. To preach his doctrine there was but (as we say) to run his head against a post; and therefore *prophesy no more there*. But,

2. He persuades him that the land of Judah was the fittest place for him to set up in: *Flee thee away thither with all speed, and there eat bread, and prophesy there*. There thou wilt be safe; there thou wilt be welcome; the king's court and chapel there are on thy side; the prophets there will second thee; the priests and princes there will take notice of thee, and allow thee an honourable maintenance. See here, (1.) How willing wicked men are to get clear of their faithful reprovers, and how ready to *say to the seers, See not*, or *See not for us*; the two witnesses were a torment to those that dwelt on the earth (Rev. xi. 10), and it were indeed a pity that men should be *tormented before the time*, but that it is in order to the preventing of eternal torment. (2.) How apt worldly men are to measure others by themselves. Amaziah, as a priest, aimed at nothing but the profits of his place, and he thought Amos, as a prophet, had the same views, and therefore advised him to prophesy where he might *eat bread*, where he might be sure to have as much as he chose; whereas Amos was to prophesy where God appointed him, and where there was most need of him, not where he would get most money. Note, Those that make gain their godliness, and are governed by the hopes of wealth and preferment themselves, are ready to think these the most powerful inducements with others also.

III. The reply which Amos made to these suggestions of Amaziah's. He did not *consult with flesh and blood*, nor was it his care to enrich himself, but to *make full proof of his ministry*, and to be found faithful in the discharge of it, not to sleep in a whole skin, but to keep a good conscience; and therefore he resolved to abide by his post, and, in answer to Amaziah,

1. He justified himself in his constant adherence to his work and to his place (v. 14, 15); and that which he was sure would not only bear him out, but bind him to it, was that he had a divine warrant and commission for it: "*I was no prophet, nor prophet's son, neither born nor bred to the office, not originally designed for a prophet, as Samuel and Jeremiah, not educated in the schools of*



the prophets, as many others were; but *I was a herdsman*, a keeper of cattle, and a *gatherer of sycamore-fruit*." Our sycamores bear no fruit, but, it seems, theirs did, which Amos gathered either for his cattle or for himself and his family, or to sell. He was a plain country-man, bred up and employed in country work and used to country fare. He followed the flocks as well as the herds, and thence God took him, and bade him go and prophesy to his people Israel, deliver to them such messages as he should from time to time receive from the Lord. God made him a prophet, and a prophet to them, appointed him his work and appointed him his post. Therefore he ought not to be silenced, for, (1.) He could produce a divine commission for what he did. He did not run before he was sent, but pleads, as Paul, that he was called to be an apostle; and men will find it is at their peril if they contradict and oppose any that come in God's name, if they say to his seers, *See not*, or silence those whom he has bidden to speak; such fight against God. An affront done to an ambassador is an affront to the prince that sends him. Those that have a warrant from God ought not to fear the face of man. (2.) The mean character he wore before he received that commission strengthened his warrant, so far was it from weakening it. [1.] He had no thoughts at all of ever being a prophet, and therefore his prophesying could not be imputed to a raised expectation or a heated imagination, but purely to a divine impulse. [2.] He was not educated nor instructed in the art or mystery of prophesying, and therefore he must have his abilities for it immediately from God, which is an undeniable proof that he had his mission from him. The apostles, being originally unlearned and ignorant men, evidenced that they owed their knowledge to their having been with Jesus, Acts iv. 13. When the treasure is put into such earthen vessels, it is thereby made to appear that the excellency of the power is of God, and not of man, 2 Cor. iv. 7. [3.] He had an honest calling, by which he could comfortably maintain himself and his family, and therefore did not need to prophesy for bread, as Amaziah suggested (v. 12), did not take it up as a trade to live by, but as a trust to honour God and do good with. [4.] He had all his days been accustomed to a plain homely way of living among poor husbandmen, and never affected either gaities or dainties, and therefore would not have thrust himself so near the king's court and chapel if the business God had called him to had not called him thither. [5.] Having been so meanly bred, he could not have had courage to speak to kings and great men, especially to speak such bold and provoking things to them, if he had not been animated by a greater spirit than his own. If God, that sent him, had not strengthened him, he could not thus have set his face as a flint, Isa. l. 7. Note,

God often chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty; and a herdsman of Tekoa puts to shame a priest of Bethel, when he receives from God authority and ability to act for him.

2. He condemns Amaziah for the opposition he gave him, and denounces the judgments of God against him, not from any private resentment or revenge, but in the name of the Lord and by authority from him, v. 15, 17. Amaziah would not suffer Amos to preach at all, and therefore he is particularly ordered to preach against him: *Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord, hear it and tremble*. Those that cannot bear general woes may expect woes of their own. The sin he is charged with is forbidding Amos to prophesy; we do not find that he beat him, or put him in the stocks, only he enjoined him silence: *Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac*; he must not only not thunder against them, but he must not so much as drop a word against them; he cannot bear, no, not the most gentle distilling of that rain, that small rain. Let him therefore hear his doom.

(1.) For the opposition he gave to Amos God will bring ruin upon himself and his family. This was the sin that filled the measure of his iniquity. [1.] He shall have no comfort in any of his relations, but be afflicted in those that were nearest to him: *His wife shall be a harlot*; either she shall be forcibly abused by the soldiers, as the Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah (they ravish the women in Zion, Lam. v. 11), or she shall herself wickedly play the harlot, which, though her sin, her great sin, would be his affliction, his great affliction and reproach, and a just punishment upon him for promoting spiritual whoredom. Sometimes the sins of our relations are to be looked upon as the judgments of God upon us. His children, though they keep honest, yet shall not keep alive: *His sons and his daughters shall fall by the sword* of war, and he himself shall live to see it. He had trained them up in iniquity, and therefore God will cut them off in it. [2.] He shall be stripped of all his estate; it shall fall into the hand of the enemy, and be divided by line, by lot, among the soldiers. What is ill gotten will not be long kept. [3.] He shall himself perish in a strange country, not in the land of Israel, which had been holiness to the Lord, but in a polluted land, in a heathen country, the fittest place for such a heathen to end his days in, that hated and silenced God's prophets and contributed so much to the polluting of his own land with idolatry.

(2.) Notwithstanding the opposition he gave to Amos, God will bring ruin upon the land and nation. He was accused for saying, *Israel shall be led away captive* (v. 11), but he stands to it, and repeats it; for the unbelief of man shall not make the word of God of no effect. The burden of the word of



the Lord may be striven with, but it cannot be shaken off. Let Amaziah rage, and fret, and say what he will to the contrary, *Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.* Note, It is to no purpose to contend with the judgments of God; for when God judges he will overcome. Stopping the mouths of God's ministers will not stop the progress of God's word, for it shall not return void.

## CHAP. VIII.

Sinful times are here attended with sorrowful times, so necessary is the connexion between them; it is threatened here again and again that the laughter shall be turned into mourning. I. By the vision of "a basket of summer-fruit" is signified the hastening on of the ruin threatened (ver. 1—3) and that shall change their note. II. Oppressors are here called to an account for their abusing the poor; and their destruction is foretold, which will set them a mourning, ver. 4—10. III. A famine of the word of God is here made the punishment of a people that go a whoring after other gods (ver. 11—14); yet for this, which is the most mournful judgment of all, they are not here brought in mourning.

**T**HUS hath the Lord God showed unto me: and behold a basket of summer-fruit. 2 And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer-fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. 3 And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: *there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.*

The great reason why sinners defer their repentance *de die in diem—from day to day*, is because they think God thus defers his judgments, and there is no song wherewith they so effectually sing themselves asleep as that, *My Lord delays his coming*; and therefore God, by his prophets, frequently represents to Israel the day of his wrath not only as just and certain, but as very near and hastening on apace; so he does in these verses.

I. The approach of the threatened ruin is represented by a *basket of summer-fruit* which Amos saw in vision; for the Lord showed it to him (v. 1) and obliged him to take notice of it (v. 2): *Amos, what seest thou?* Note, It concerns us to enquire whether we do indeed see that which God has been pleased to show us, and hear what he has been pleased to say to us; for many a thing God speaks, God shows *once, yea twice*, and men *perceive it not*. Are we in the midst of the visions of the Almighty? Let us consider what we see. He saw a *basket of summer-fruit* gathered and ready to be eaten, which signified, 1. That they were ripe for destruction, rotten ripe, and it was time for God to put in the sickle of his judgments and to cut them off; nay, the thing was in effect done already, and they lay ready to be eaten up. 2. That the year of God's patience was drawing towards a conclusion; it was autumn with them, and their year would quickly have its

period in a dismal winter. 3. Those we call *summer-fruits* that will not keep till winter, but must be used immediately, an emblem of this people, that had nothing solid or consistent in them.

II. The intent and meaning of this vision is no more than this: It signifies that *the end has come upon my people Israel*. The word that signifies the end is *ketz*, which is of near affinity with *kitz*, the word used for *summer-fruit*. God has long spared them, and borne with them, but now his patience is tired out; they are indeed *his people Israel*, but their end, that *latter end* they have been so often reminded of, but have so long forgotten, has now come. Note, If sinners do not make an end of sin, God will make an end of them, yea though they be *his people Israel*. What was said ch. vii. 8 is here repeated as God's determined resolution, *I will not again pass by them any more*; they shall not be connived at as they have been, nor the judgment coming turned away.

III. The consequence of this shall be a universal desolation (v. 3): When *the end* shall come sorrow and death shall ride in triumph; they are accustomed to go together, and shall at length go away together, when in heaven *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow*, Rev. xxi. 4. But here in a sinful world, in a sinful nation, 1. Sorrow reigns, reigns to such a degree that *the songs of the temple shall be howlings*—the songs of God's temple at Jerusalem, or rather of their idol-temples, where they used, when, in honour of the golden calves, they had *eaten and drunk, to rise up to play*. They were perhaps wanton profane songs; and it is certain that sooner or later those will be turned into howlings. Or, if they had a sound and show of piety and religion, yet, not coming from the heart, nor being sung to the glory of God, he valued them not, but would justly turn them into howlings. Note, Mourning will follow sinful mirth, yea, and sacred mirth too, if it be not sincere. And, when God's judgments are abroad, they will soon turn the greatest joy into the greatest heaviness, the temple-songs, which used to sound so pleasantly, not only into sighs and groans, but into loud howlings, which sound dimly. They shall come to the temple, and, finding that in ruins, there they shall howl most bitterly. 2. Death reigns, reigns to such a degree that there shall be *dead bodies, many dead bodies in every place* (Ps. cx. 6), slain by sword or pestilence, so many that the survivors shall not bury them with the usual pomp and solemnity of funerals; they shall not so much as have the bell tolled, but they shall *cast them forth with silence*, shall bury them in the dead of the night, and charge all about them to be silent and to take no notice of it, either because they have not wherewithal to bear the charges of a funeral, or because, the killing disease being infectious, none will come near them, or for

fear the enemy should be provoked, if they should be known to lament their slain. Or they shall charge themselves and one another silently to submit to the hand of God in these desolating judgments, and not to repine and quarrel with him. Or it may be taken not for a patient, but a sullen silence; their hearts shall be hardened, and all these judgments shall not extort from them one word of acknowledgment either of God's righteousness or their own unrighteousness.

4 Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, 5 Saying, when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? 6 That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? 7 The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. 8 Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as *by* the flood of Egypt. 9 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: 10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

God is here contending with proud oppressors, and showing them,

1. The heinousness of the sin they were guilty of; in short, they had the character of the unjust judge (Luke xviii. 2) that neither *feared God* nor *regarded man*.

1. Observe them in their devotions, and you will say, "They have no reverence for God." Bad as they are, they do indeed keep up a show and form of godliness; they observe the *sabbath* and the *new moon*; they put some difference between those days and other days, but they were soon weary of them, and had no affection at all to them, for their hearts were wholly set upon the world and the things of it. It is a sad character which this gives of them, that they said, *When will the sabbath be gone, that we may sell corn?* Yet it is still the character

of many that are called Christians. (1.) They were weary of sabbath days. "When will they be *gone*?" They were weary of the restraints of the sabbaths and the new-moons, and wished them over because they might *do no servile work therein*. They were weary of the work or business of the sabbaths and new-moons, snuffed at it (Mal. i. 13), and were, as *Doeg*, detained before the Lord (1 Sam. xxi. 7); they would rather have been any where else than about God's altars. Note, Sabbath days and sabbath work are a burden to carnal hearts, that are always afraid of doing too much for God and eternity. Can we spend our time better than in communion with God? And how much time do we spend pleasantly with the world? Will not the sabbath be gone before we have done the work of it and reaped the gains of it? Why then should we be in such haste to part with it? (2.) They were fond of market-days; they longed to be *selling corn* and *setting forth wheat*. When they were employed in religious services they were thinking of their marketings; their hearts *went after their covetousness* (Ezek. xxxiii. 31), and thus made my Father's house a house of merchandise, nay, a den of thieves. They were weary of holy duties because their worldly business stood still the while; in this they were as in their element, but in God's sanctuary as a fish upon dry ground. Note, Those are strangers to God, and enemies to themselves, that love market days better than sabbath days, that would rather be selling corn than worshipping God.

2. Observe them in their conversations, and you will see they have no regard to man; and this commonly follows upon the former; those that have lost the savour of piety will not long retain the sense of common honesty. They neither *do justly* nor *love mercy*. (1.) They cheat those they deal with. When they *sell their corn* they impose upon the buyer, both in giving out the goods and in receiving the money for them. They measure him the corn by their own measure, and pretend to give him what he agreed for, but they *make the ephah small*. The measure is scanty, and not statute-measure, and so they wrong him that way. When they receive his money they must weigh it in their own scales, by their own weights, and the *shekel* they weigh by is above standard: 'They *make the shekel great*, so that the money, being found too light, must have more added to it; and so they cheat that way too, and this under colour and pretence of exactness in doing justice. By such wicked practices as these men show such a greediness of the world, such a love of themselves, such a contempt of mankind in general, of the particular persons they deal with, and of the sacred laws of justice, as prove them to have in their hearts neither the fear nor the love of that God who has so plainly said that *false weights and balances are an abomination to him*. An-



other instance of their fraudulent dealing is that they *sell the refuse of the wheat*, and, taking advantage of their neighbour's ignorance or necessity, make them take it at the same price at which they sell the *finest of the wheat*. (2.) They are barbarous and unmerciful to the poor: They *swallow up the needy*, and *make the poor of the land to fail*. [1.] They valued themselves so much on their wealth that they looked upon all that were poor with the highest contempt imaginable; they hated them, could not endure them, but abandoned them, and therefore did what they could to make them cease, not by relieving them to make them cease to be poor, but by banishing and destroying them to make them cease to be, or at least to be in their land. But he who thus *reproaches the poor despises his Maker*, in whose hands *rich and poor meet together*. [2.] They were so eager to increase their wealth, and make it more, that they robbed the poor to enrich themselves; and they fastened upon the poor, to make a prey of them, because they were not able to obtain any redress nor to resist or revenge the violence of their oppressors. Those riches that are got by the ruin of the poor will bring ruin on those that get them. They swallowed up the poor by making them hard bargains, and cheating them in those bargains; for *therefore they falsify the balances by deceit*, not only that they *may enrich themselves*, may have money at command, and so may have every thing else (as they think) at command too, but that they may impoverish those about them, and bring them so low that they may force them to become slaves to them, and so, having drained them of every thing else, they may have their labour for nothing, or next to nothing. Thus *they buy the poor for silver*; they bring them and their *children into bondage*, because they have not wherewithal to pay for the corn they have bought; see Neh. v. 2—5. And there were so many that were reduced to this extremity that the price was very low; and the oppressors had beaten it down so that you might buy a poor man to be your slave for a pair of shoes. Property was first invaded and then liberty; it is the method of oppressors first to make men beggars and then to make them their vassals. Thus is the dignity of the human nature lost in the misery of those that are trampled on and the tenderness of it in the sin of those that trample on them.

II. The grievousness of the punishment that shall be inflicted on them for this sin. When the poor are injured they will *cry unto God*, and he will hear their cry, and reckon with those that are injurious to them, for, they being his receivers, he takes the wrongs done to them as done to himself, Exod. xxii. 23, 24.

1. God will remember their sin against them: *He has sworn by the excellency of Jacob* (v. 7), by himself, for he can swear by

no greater; and who but he is the glory and magnificence of Jacob? He has sworn by those tokens of his presence with them, and his favour to them, which they had profaned and abused, and had done what they could to make them detestable to him; for he is said (ch. vi. 8) to *abhor the excellency of Jacob*. He swears in his wrath, swears by his own name, that name which was so well known and was so great in Israel. He swears, *Surely I will never forget any of their works*, but upon all occasions they shall be remembered against them, for more is implied than is expressed. *I will never forget them* is as much as to say, *I will never forgive them*; and then it proclaims the case of these unjust unmerciful men to be miserable indeed, eternally miserable; woe, and a thousand woes, to that man that is cut off by an oath of God from all benefit by pardoning mercy; and those have reason to fear judgment without mercy that have *shown no mercy*.

2. He will bring utter ruin and confusion upon them. It is here described largely, and in a great variety of emphatic expressions, that, if possible, they might be frightened into a sincere repentance and reformation. (1.) There shall be a universal terror and consternation: *Shall not the land tremble for this* (v. 8), *this land*, out of which you thought to drive the poor? *Shall not every one mourn that dwells therein*? Certainly he shall. Note, Those that will not tremble and mourn as they ought for national sins shall be made to tremble and mourn for national judgments, those that look without concern upon the sins of the oppressors, which should make them tremble, and upon the miseries of the oppressed, which should them mourn, God will find out a way to make them tremble at the fury of those that oppress them and mourn for their own losses and sufferings by it. (2.) There shall be a universal deluge and desolation. When God comes forth against them the waters of trouble and calamity shall *rise up wholly as a flood*, that swells, when it is dammed up, and soon overflows its banks. Every thing shall make against them. That with which they thought to check the progress of God's judgments shall but make them rise the higher. Judgments shall force their way as the *breaking forth of waters*. The whole land shall be *cast out, and drowned*, and laid under water, as the land of Egypt is every year by the overflowing of its river Nile. Or the expressions may allude to some former judgments of God. Their ruin shall *rise up wholly as a flood*, as Noah's flood, which overwhelmed the whole world, so shall this the whole land; and the land shall be *cast out, and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt*, as Pharaoh and his Egyptians were buried in the Red Sea, which was to them the *flood of Egypt*, both which judgments, as this which is here threatened, were the punishment of violence and oppression, which the Lord is the avenger of.



3. It shall surprise them, and come upon them when they little think of it (v. 9): "*I will cause the sun to go down at noon*, when it is in its full strength and lustre, at their noon, when they promise themselves a long afternoon, and think they have at least half a day good before them. The *earth shall be darkened in the clear day*, when every thing looks pleasant and hopeful." Thus uncertain are all our creature-comforts and enjoyments, even life itself; the highest degree of health and prosperity often proves the next degree to sickness and adversity; Job's sun *went down at noon*; many are taken away in the midst of their days, and their sun goes down at noon. In the midst of life we are in death. Thus terrible are the judgments of God to those that sleep in security; they are to them as the sun's *going down at noon*; the less they are expected the more confounding they are. When they *cry Peace and safety* then sudden destruction comes, comes as a snare, Luke xxi. 35.

4. It shall change their note, and mar all their mirth (v. 10): *I will turn your feasts into mourning*, as (v. 3) the *songs of the temple into howlings*. Note, The end of the sinner's mirth and jollity is heaviness. As to the *upright there arises light in the darkness*, which gives them the *oil of joy for mourning*, so on the wicked there falls darkness in the midst of light, which turns their *laughter into mourning*, their *joy into heaviness*. So great, so general, shall the desolation be, that *sackcloth shall be brought upon all loins, and baldness upon every head*, instead of the *well-set hair* and the rich garments they used to wear. The mourning at that day shall be as *mourning for an only son*, which denotes the most bitter and lasting lamentation. But are there are no hopes that when things are at the worst they will mend, and that at evening time it will yet be light? No, even *the end thereof shall be as a bitter day*, a day of bitter mourning; the state of impenitent sinners grows worse and worse, and the last of all will be the worst of all. *This shall you have at my hand, you shall lie down in sorrow*.

11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. 13 In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst. 14 They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth;

even they shall fall, and never rise up again.

In these verses is threatened,

1. A general judgment of spiritual famine coming upon the whole land, a *famine of the word of God*, the failing of oracles and the scarcity of good preaching. This is spoken of as a thing at some distance: *The days come*, they will come hereafter, when another kind of darkness shall come upon that land of light. When Amos prophesied, and for a considerable time after, they had great plenty of prophets, abundant opportunities of *hearing the word of God*, in season and out of season; they had precept upon precept and line upon line; prophecy was their daily bread; and it is probable that they surfeited upon it, as Israel on the manna, and therefore God threatens that hereafter he will deprive them of this privilege. Probably in the land of Israel there were not so many prophets, about the time that their destruction came upon them, as there were in the land of Judah; and when the ten tribes went into captivity they *saw not their signs*, there were *no more any prophets*, none to show them *how long*, Ps. lxxiv. 9. The Jewish church, after Malachi, had no prophets for many ages; and some think this threatening looks further yet, to the blindness which has in part happened to Israel in the days of the Messiah, and the veil that is on the heart of the unbelieving Jews. They reject the gospel, and the ministers of it that God sends to them, and covet to have prophets of their own, as their fathers had, but they shall have none, *the kingdom of God being taken from them and given to another people*. Observe here,

1. What the judgment itself is that is threatened. It is a famine, a scarcity, not of bread and water (which are the necessary supports of the body, and the want of which is very grievous), but a much sorer judgment than that, even a *famine of hearing the words of the Lord*. There shall be no congregations for ministers to preach to, nor any ministers to preach, nor any instructions and abilities given to those that do set up for preachers, to fit them for their work. The *word of the Lord* shall be *precious and scarce*; there shall be no *vision*, 1 Sam. iii. 1. They shall have the written word, Bibles to read, but no ministers to explain and apply it to them, the water in the well, but nothing to draw with. It is a gracious promise (Isa. xxx. 20) that though they have a scarcity of bread they shall have plenty of the means of grace. God will *give them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction*, but their eyes shall see their teachers; and it was a common saying among the Puritans that brown bread and the gospel are good fare. But it is here a threatening that on the contrary they should have plenty enough of bread and water, and yet their teachers should



be removed. Now, (1.) This was the departure of a great part of their glory from their land. This made their nation great and high, that to them were committed the oracles of God; but, when these were taken from them, their beauty was stained and their honour laid in the dust. (2.) This was a token of God's highest displeasure against them. Surely he was angry indeed with them when he would no more speak to them as he had done, and had abandoned them to ruin when he would no more afford them the means of bringing them to repentance. (3.) This made all the other calamities that were upon them truly melancholy, that they had no prophets to instruct and comfort them from the word of God, nor to give them any hopeful prospect. We should say at any time, and shall say in a time of trouble, that a famine of the word of God is the sorest famine, the heaviest judgment.

2. What will be the effect of this (v. 12): *They shall wander from sea to sea*, from the sea of Tiberias to the Great Sea, from one border of the country to another, to see if God will send them prophets, either by sea or land, from other countries; since they have none among themselves, they shall go from the north to the east; when they are disappointed in one place they shall try another, and shall run to and fro, as men at a loss, and in a hot pursuit to seek the word of the Lord, to enquire if there be any prophets, any prophecy, any message from God, but they shall not find it. (1.) Though to many this is no affliction at all, yet some will be very sensible of it as a great grievance, and will gladly travel far to hear a good sermon; but they shall sensibly feel the loss of those mercies which others have foolishly sinned away. (2.) Even those that slighted prophets when they had them shall wish for them, as Saul did for Samuel, when they are deprived of them. Many never know the worth of mercies till they feel the want of them. Or it may be meant thus, Though they should thus wander from sea to sea, in quest of the word of God, yet they shall not find it. Note, The means of grace are moveable things; and the candlestick, when we think it stands most firmly, may be removed out of its place (Rev. ii. 5); and those that now slight the days of the son of man may wish in vain to see them. And in the day of this famine the fair virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst (v. 13); those who, one would think, could well enough have borne the toil, shall sink under it. The Jewish churches, and the masters of their synagogues, some take to be meant by the virgins and the young men; these shall lose the word of the Lord, and the benefit of divine revelation, and shall faint away for want of it, shall lose all their strength and beauty. Those that trust in their own merit and righteousness, and think they have no need of Christ, others take to be meant by the fair virgins and the

choice young men; they shall faint for thirst, when those that hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ shall be abundantly satisfied and filled.

II. The particular destruction of those that were ringleaders in idolatry, v. 14. Observe, 1. The sin they are charged with: *They swear by the sin of Samaria*, that is, by the god of Samaria, the idol that was worshipped at Bethel, not far off from Samaria. Thus did they glory in their shame, and swear by that as their god which was their iniquity, thinking that could help them which would certainly ruin them, and giving the highest honour to that which they should have looked upon with the utmost abhorrence and detestation. They say, *Thy god, O Dan! liveth*; that was the other golden calf, a dumb dead idol, and yet caressed and complimented as if it had been the living and true God. They say, *The manner, or way, of Beer-sheba liveth*; they swore by the religion of Beer-sheba, the way and manner of worship used there, which they looked upon as sacred, and therefore swore by and appealed to as a judge of controversy. Thus the papists swear by the mass, as the manner of Beer-sheba. 2. The destruction they are threatened with. Those who thus give that honour to idols which is due to God alone will find that the God they affront is thereby made their enemy, so that they shall fall, and the gods they serve cannot stand their friends, so that they shall never rise again. They will find that God is jealous and will resent the indignity done him, and that he will be victorious and it is to no purpose to contend with him.

#### CHAP. IX.

In this chapter we have, I. Judgment threatened, which the sinners shall not escape (ver. 1-4); which an almighty power shall inflict (ver. 5, 6), which the people of Israel have deserved as a sinful people (ver. 7, 8); and yet it shall not be the utter ruin of their nation (ver. 8), for a remnant of good people shall escape, ver. 9. But the wicked ones shall perish, ver. 10. II. Mercy promised, which was to be bestowed in the latter days (ver. 11-15); as appears by the application of it to the days of the Messiah, Acts xv. 16. And with those comfortable promises, after all the foregoing rebukes and threatenings, the book concludes.

I SAW the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. 2 Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: 3 And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command

the serpent, and he shall bite them : 4 And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them : and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good. 5 And the Lord God of hosts *is* he that toucheth the land, and it shall melt, and all that dwell therein shall mourn : and it shall rise up wholly like a flood ; and shall be drowned, as *by* the flood of Egypt. 6 *It is* he that buildeth his stories in the heaven, and hath founded his troop in the earth ; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth : The LORD *is* his name. 7 *Are ye* not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel ? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt ? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir ? 8 Behold, the eyes of the Lord God *are* upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth ; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the LORD. 9 For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as *corn* is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. 10 All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.

We have here the justice of God passing sentence upon a provoking people ; and observe,

I. With what solemnity the sentence is passed. The prophet saw in vision *the Lord standing upon the altar* (v. 1), the altar of burnt-offerings ; for *the Lord has a sacrifice*, and multitudes must fall as victims to his justice. He is removed from the *mercy-seat* between the *cherubim*, and stands upon *the altar*, the *judgment-seat*, on which the fire of God used to fall, to devour the sacrifices. He stands upon *the altar*, to show that the ground of his controversy with this people was their profanation of his holy things ; here he stands to avenge the quarrel of his altar, as also to signify that the sin of the house of Israel, like that of the house of Eli, shall *not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever*, 1 Sam. iii. 14. He stands on the altar, to prohibit sacrifice. Now the order given is, *Smite the lintel of the door of the temple*, the chapter, smite it with such a blow *that the*

*posts may shake*, and cut them, wound them *in the head, all of them* ; break down the door of God's house, or of the courts of his house, in token of this, that he is going out from it, and forsaking it, and then all judgments are breaking in upon it. Or it signifies the destruction of those in the first place that should be as the door-posts to the nation for its defence, so that, they being broken down, it becomes as a *city without gates and bars*. "Smite the king, who is as the lintel of the door, that the princes, who are as the posts, may shake ; cut them in the head, cleave them down, *all of them*, as wood for the fire ; and I will slay the last of them, the posterity of them, them and their families, or the least of them, them and all that are employed under them ; or, I will slay them *all*, them and all that remain of them, till it comes to the last man ; the slaughter shall be general." There is no living for those on whom God has said, *I will slay them*, no standing before his sword.

II. What effectual care is taken that none shall escape the execution of this sentence. This is enlarged upon here, and is intended for warning to all that *provoke the Lord to jealousy*. Let sinners read it, and tremble ; as there is no fighting it out with God, so there is no fleeing from him. His judgments, when they come with commission, as they will overpower the strongest that think to outface them, so they will overtake the swiftest that think to out-run them, v. 2. Those of them that flee, and take to their heels, shall soon be out of breath, and shall not flee away out of the reach of danger ; for, as sometimes *the wicked flee when none pursues*, so he cannot flee away when God pursues, though *he would fain flee out of his hand*. Nay, *he that escapes of them*, that thinks he has gained his point, *shall not be delivered*. *Evil pursues sinners*, and will arrest them. This is here enlarged upon by showing that wherever sinners flee for shelter from God's justice, it will overtake them, and the shelter will prove but a *refuge of lies*. What David says of the ubiquity of God's presence (Ps. cxxxix. 7—10) is here said of the extent of God's power and justice. (1.) Hell itself, though it has its name in English from its being *hilled*, or *covered over*, or *hidden*, cannot hide them (v. 2) : "Though they dig into hell, into the centre of the earth, or the darkest recesses of it, yet *thence shall my hand take them*, and bring them forth to be made public monuments of divine justice." The grave is a hiding-place to the righteous from the malice of the world (Job iii. 17), but it shall be no hiding-place to the wicked from the justice of God ; thence God's hands shall take them, when they shall rise in the great day to *everlasting shame and contempt*. (2.) Heaven, though it has its name from being *heaved*, or lifted up, shall not put them out of the reach of God's judgments ; as hell cannot hide them, so heaven will not.



Though they climb up to heaven in their own conceit, yet thence will I bring them down. Those whom God brings to heaven by his grace shall never be brought down; but those who climb thither themselves, by their own presumption, and confidence in themselves, will be brought down and filled with shame. (3.) *The top of Carmel*, one of the highest parts of the dust of the world in that country, shall not protect them: "Though they hide themselves there, where they imagine nobody will look for them, I will search, and take them out thence; neither the thickest bushes, nor the darkest caves, in the top of Carmel, will serve to hide them." (4.) *The bottom of the sea* shall not serve to conceal them; though they think to hide themselves there, even there the judgments of God shall find them out, and lay hold on them: *Thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them, the crooked serpent, even the dragon that is in the sea*, Isa. xxvii. 1. They shall find their plague and death where they hope to find shelter and protection; diving will stand them in no more stead than climbing. (5.) Remote countries will not befriend them, nor shall less judgments excuse them from greater (v. 4): *Though they go into captivity before their enemies*, who carry them to places at a great distance, and mingle them with their own people, among whom they seem to be lost, yet that shall not serve their turn: *Thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them, the sword of the enemy, or one another's sword*. When God judges he will overcome. That which binds on all this, makes their escape impossible and their ruin inevitable, is that God will set his eyes upon them for evil, and not for good. His eyes are in every place, are upon all men and upon all the ways of men, upon some for good, to show himself strong on their behalf, but upon others for evil, to take notice of their sins (Job xiii. 27) and take all opportunities of punishing them for their sins. Their case is truly miserable who have the providence of God: and all the dispensations of it, against them, working for their hurt.

3. What a great and mighty God he is that passes this sentence upon them, and will take the executing of it into his own hands. Threatenings are more or less formidable according to the power of him that threatens. We laugh at impotent wrath; but the wrath of God is not so; it is omnipotent wrath. Who knows the power of it? What he had before said he would do (ch. viii. 8) is here repeated, that he would make the land melt and tremble, and all that dwell therein mourn, that the judgment should rise up wholly like a flood, and the country should be drowned, and laid under water, as by the flood of Egypt, v. 5. But is he able to make his words good? Yes, certainly he is; he does but touch the land and it melts, touch the mountains and they smoke; he can do it with the greatest ease, for, (1.) He is the Lord God of hosts,

who undertakes to do it, the God who has all the power in his hand, and all creatures at his beck and call, who having made them all, and given them their several capacities, makes what use he pleases of them and all their powers. Very miserable is the case of those who have the Lord of hosts against them, for they have hosts against them, the whole creation at war with them. (2.) He is the Creator and governor of the upper world: *It is he that builds his stories in the heavens*, the celestial orbs, or spheres, one over another, as so many stories in a high and stately palace. They are his, for he built them at first, when he said, *Let there be a firmament, and he made the firmament*; and he builds them still, is continually building them, not that they need repair, but by his providence he still upholds them; his power is the pillars of heaven, by which it is borne up. Now he that has the command of those stories is certainly to be feared, for thence, as from a castle, he can fire upon his enemies, or cast upon them great hailstones, as on the Canaanites, or make the stars in their courses, the furniture of those stories, to fight against them, as against Sisera. (3.) He has the management and command of this lower world too, in which we dwell, the terraqueous globe, both earth and sea, so that, which way soever his enemies think to make their escape, he will meet them, or to make opposition, he will match them. Do they think to make a land-fight of it? He has founded his troop in the earth, his troop of guards, which he has at command, and makes use of for the protection of his subjects and the punishment of his enemies. All the creatures on earth make one bundle (as the margin reads it), one bundle of arrows, out of which he takes what he pleases to discharge against the persecutors, Ps. vii. 13. They are all one army, one body, so closely are they connected, and so harmoniously and so much in concert do they act for the accomplishing of their Creator's purposes. Do they think to make a sea-fight of it? He will be too hard for them there, for he has the waters of the sea at command; even its waves, the most tumultuous rebellious waters, do obey him. He calls for the waters of the sea in the course of his common providence, causes vapours to ascend out of it, and pours them out in showers, the small rain and the great rain of his strength, upon the face of the earth; this was mentioned before as a reason why we should seek the Lord (ch. v. 8) and make him our friend, as it is here made a reason why we should fear him and dread having him for our enemy.

4. How justly God passes this sentence upon the people of Israel. He does not destroy them by an act of sovereignty, but by an act of righteousness; for (v. 8), it is a sinful kingdom, and the eyes of the Lord are upon it, discovering it to be so; he sees the great sinfulness of it, and therefore he will



*destroy it from off the face of the earth.* Note, When those kingdoms that in name and profession were holy kingdoms, and kingdoms of priests, as Israel was, become sinful kingdoms, no other can be expected than that they should be cut off and abandoned. Let sinful kingdoms, and sinful families, and sinful persons too, see the eyes of the Lord upon them, observing all their wickedness, and reserving the notice of it for the day of reckoning and recompence. This being a sinful kingdom, see how light God makes of it, v. 7.

(1.) Of the relation wherein he stood to it: *Are you not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?* A sad change! Children of Israel become as children of the Ethiopians! [1.] They were so in themselves; that was their sin. It is a thing to be greatly lamented that the children of Israel often become as children of the Ethiopians; the children of godly parents degenerate, and become the reverse of those that went before them. Those that were well-educated, and trained up in the knowledge and fear of God, and set out well, and promised fair, throw off their profession and become as bad as the worst. *How has the gold become dim!* [2.] They were so in God's account, and that was their punishment. He valued them no more, though they were children of Israel, than if they had been *children of the Ethiopians*. We read of one in the title of Ps. vii. that was *Cush* (an *Ethiopian*, so some understand it) and yet a Benjamite. Those that by birth and profession are children of Israel, if they degenerate, and become wicked and vile, are to God no more than children of the Ethiopians. This is an intimation of the rejection of the unbelieving Jews in the days of the Messiah; because they embraced not the doctrine of Christ, the kingdom of God was taken from them, they were unchurched, and cast out of covenant, became as children of the Ethiopians, and are so to this day. And it is true of those that are called Christians, but do not live up to their name and profession, that rest in the form of piety, but live under the power of reigning iniquity, that they are to God as children of the Ethiopians; he rejects them, and their services.

(2.) See how light he makes of the favours he had conferred upon them; they thought he would not, he could not, cast them off, and put them upon a level with other nations, because he had done that for them which he had not done for other nations, whereby they thought he was bound to them, so as never to leave them. "No," says he, "The favours shown to you are not so distinguishing as you think they are: *Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt?* It is true I have; but I have also brought the *Philistines from Caphtor*, or *Cappadocia*, where they were natives, or captives, or both;

they are called the *remnant of the country of Caphtor* (Jer. xlvii. 4), and the *Philistines* are joined with the *Caphtorim*, Gen. x. 14. In like manner the Syrians were brought up from Kir when they had been carried away thither, 2 Kings xvi. 9. Note, If God's Israel lose the peculiarity of their holiness, they lose the peculiarity of their privileges; and what was designed as a favour of special grace shall be set in another light, shall have its property altered, and shall become an act of *common providence*; if professors liken themselves to the world, God will level them with the world. And, if we live not up to the obligation of God's mercies, we forfeit the honour and comfort of them.

5. How graciously God will separate between the precious and the vile in the day of retribution. Though the wicked Israelites shall be as the wicked Ethiopians, and their being called Israelites shall stand them in no stead, yet the pious Israelites shall not be as the wicked ones; no, the *Judge of all the earth will do right*, more right than to *slay the righteous with the wicked*, Gen. xviii. 25. *His eyes are upon the sinful kingdom*, to spy out those in it who preserve their integrity and swim against the stream, who sigh and cry for the abominations of their land, and they shall be marked for preservation, so that the destruction shall not be total: *I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob*, not ruin them by wholesale and in the gross, good and bad together, but I will distinguish, as becomes a righteous judge. The house of Israel shall be *sifted as corn is sifted*; they shall be greatly hurried, and shaken, and tossed, but still in the hands of God, in both his hands, as the sieve in the hands of him that sifts (v. 9): *I will sift the house of Israel among all nations*. Wherever they are shaken and scattered, God will have his eye upon them, and will take care to separate between the corn and chaff, which was the thing he designed in sifting them. (1.) The righteous ones among them, that are as the solid wheat, shall none of them perish; they shall be delivered either from or through the common calamities of the kingdom; *not the least grain shall fall on the earth*, so as to be lost and forgotten—not the least *stone* (so the word is), for the good corn is weighty as a stone in comparison with that which we call *light corn*. Note, Whatever shakings there may be in the world, God does and will effectually provide that none who are truly his shall be truly miserable. (2.) The wicked ones among them who are hardened in their sins shall all of them perish, v. 10. See what a height of impiety they have come to: *They say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us*. They think they are innocent, and do not deserve punishment, or that the profession they make of relation to God will be their exemption and security from punishment, or that they shall be able to make their part good against the judgments of



God, that they shall flee so swiftly from them that they shall not overtake them, or guard so carefully against them that they shall not prevent or surprise them. Note, Hope of impunity is the deceitful refuge of the impenitent. But see what it will come to at last: *All the sinners* that thus flatter themselves, and affront God, shall *die by the sword*, the sword of war, which to them shall be the sword of divine vengeance; yea, though they be the *sinners of my people*, for their profession shall not be their protection. Note, Evil is often nearest those that put it at the greatest distance from them.

11 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: 12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. 13 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. 14 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. 15 And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

To him to whom all the prophets bear witness this prophet, here in the close, bears his testimony, and speaks of *that day*, those days that shall come, in which God will do great things for his church, by the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, for the rejecting of which the rejection of the Jews was foretold in the foregoing verses. The promise here is said to agree to the planting of the Christian church, and in that to be fulfilled, Acts xv. 15—17. It is promised,

I. That in the Messiah the kingdom of David shall be restored (v. 11); the *tabernacle of David* it is called, that is, his house and family, which, though great and fixed, yet, in comparison with the kingdom of heaven, was mean and movable as a tabernacle. The church militant, in its present state, dwelling as in shepherds' tents to feed, as in soldiers' tents to fight, is the *tabernacle of David*. God's tabernacle is called the tabernacle of David because David de-

sired and chose to *dwell in God's tabernacle for ever*, Ps. lxi. 4. Now, 1. These tabernacles had fallen and gone to decay, the royal family was so impoverished, its power abridged, its honour stained, and laid in the dust; for many of that race degenerated, and in the captivity it lost the imperial dignity. Sore breaches were made upon it, and at length it was laid in ruins. So it was with the church of the Jews; in the latter days of it its glory departed; it was like a tabernacle broken down and brought to ruin, in respect both of purity and of prosperity. 2. By Jesus Christ these tabernacles were raised and rebuilt. In him God's covenant with David had its accomplishment; and the glory of that house, which was not only sullied, but quite sunk, revived again; the breaches of it were closed and its ruins raised up, as in the days of old; nay, the spiritual glory of the family of Christ far exceeded the temporal glory of the family of David when it was at its height. In him also God's covenant with Israel had its accomplishment, and in the gospel-church the tabernacle of God was set up among men again, and raised up out of the ruins of the Jewish state. This is quoted in the first council at Jerusalem as referring to the calling in of the Gentiles and God's *taking out of them a people for his name*. Note, While the world stands God will have a church in it, and, if it be fallen down in one place and among one people, it shall be raised up elsewhere.

II. That that kingdom shall be enlarged, and the territories of it shall extend far, by the accession of many countries to it (v. 12), that the house of David may possess the *remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen*, that is, that Christ may have them given him for his inheritance, even the *utmost parts of the earth for his possession*, Ps. ii. 8. Those that had been strangers and enemies shall become willing faithful subjects to the Son of David, shall be *added to the church*, or those of them that are *called by my name, saith the Lord*, that is, that belong to the election of grace and are ordained to eternal life (Acts xiii. 48), for it is true of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews that *the election hath obtained and the rest were blinded*, Rom. xi. 7. Christ died to *gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad*, here said to be those that were *called by his name*. The promise is to all that are *afar off*, even as many of them as *the Lord our God shall call*, Acts ii. 39. St. James expounds this as a promise that *the residue of men should seek after the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called*. But may the promise be depended upon? Yes, the Lord says this, who does this, who can do it, who has determined to do it, the power of whose grace is engaged for the doing of it, and with whom saying and doing are not two things, as they are with us.

III That in the kingdom of the Messiah

there shall be great plenty, an abundance of all good things that the country produces (v. 13): *The ploughman shall overtake the reaper*, that is, there shall be such a plentiful harvest every year, and so much corn to be gathered in, that it shall last all summer, even till autumn, when it is time to begin to plough again; and in like manner the vintage shall continue till seed-time, and there shall be such abundance of grapes that even the *mountains shall drop new wine* into the vessels of the grape-gatherers, and the hills that were dry and barren shall be moistened and shall melt with the *fatness or mellowness* (as we call it) of the soil. Compare this with Joel ii. 24, and iii. 18. This must certainly be understood of the abundance of spiritual blessings in heavenly things, which all those are, and shall be, blessed with, who are in sincerity added to Christ and his church; they shall be abundantly replenished with the goodness of God's house, with the graces and comforts of his Spirit; they shall have bread, the bread of life, to *strengthen their hearts*, and the wine of divine consolations to *make them glad—meat indeed and drink indeed*—all the benefit that comes to the souls of men from the word and Spirit of God. These had been long confined to the vineyard of the Jewish church; divine revelation, and the power that attended it, were to be found only within that enclosure; but in gospel-times the mountains and hills of the Gentile world shall be enriched with these privileges by the gospel of Christ preached, and professed, and received in the power of it. When great multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ, and nations were born at once, when the preachers of the gospel were *always caused to triumph* in the success of their preaching, then the *ploughman overtook the reaper*; and, when the Gentile churches were *enriched in all utterance, and in all knowledge*, and all manner of *spiritual gifts* (1 Cor. i. 5), then the *mountains dropped sweet wine*.

IV. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall be well peopled; as the country shall be replenished, so shall the cities be; there shall be mouths for this meat, v. 14. Those that were carried captives shall be brought back out of their captivity; their enemies shall not be able to detain them in the land of their captivity, nor shall they themselves incline to settle in it, but the remnant shall return,

and shall *build the waste cities and inhabit them*, shall form themselves into Christian churches and set up pure doctrine, worship, and discipline among them, according to the gospel charter, by which Christ's cities are incorporated; and they shall enjoy the benefit and comfort thereof; they shall *plant vineyards, and make gardens*. Though the mountains and hills drop wine, and the privileges of the gospel-church are laid in common, yet they shall enclose for themselves, not to monopolize these privileges, to the exclusion of others, but to appropriate and improve these privileges, in communion with others, and they shall *drink the wine, and eat the fruit*, of their own *vineyards and gardens*; for those that take pains in religion, as men must do about their vineyards and gardens, shall have both the pleasure and the profit of it. The *bringing again* of the captivity of God's Israel, which is here promised, may refer to the cancelling of the ceremonial law, which had been long to God's Israel as a *yoke of bondage*, and the investing of them in the liberty wherewith Christ came to make his church free, Gal. v. 1.

V. That the kingdom of the Messiah shall take such deep rooting in the world as never to be rooted out of it (v. 15): *I will plant them upon their land*. God's spiritual Israel shall be planted by the right hand of God himself upon the land assigned them, and *they shall no more be pulled up out of it*, as the old Jewish church was. God will preserve them from throwing themselves out of it by a total apostasy, and will preserve them from being thrown out of it by the malice of their enemies; the church may be corrupted, but shall not quite forsake God, may be persecuted, but shall not quite be forsaken of God, so that the gates of hell, neither with their temptations nor with their terrors, shall prevail against it. Two things secure the perpetuity of the church:—1. God's grants to it: *It is the land which I have given them*; and God will confirm and maintain his own grants. The part he has given to his people is that good part which shall never be taken from them; he will not revoke his grant, and all the powers of earth and hell shall not invalidate it. 2. Its interest in him: *He is the Lord thy God*, who has said it, and will make it good, *thine, O Israel!* who shall *reign for ever* as thine *unto all generations*. And because he lives the church shall live also.



# AN EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

## O B A D I A H.

THIS is the shortest of all the books of the Old Testament, the least of those tribes, and yet is not to be passed by, or thought meanly of, for this penny has Caesar's image and superscription upon it; it is stamped with a divine authority. There may appear much of God in a short sermon, in a little book; and much good may be done by it, *multum in parvo—much in a little*. Mr. Norris says, "If angels were to write books, we should have few folios." That may be very precious which is not voluminous. This book is entitled, *The Vision of Obadiah*. Who this Obadiah was does not appear from any other scripture. Some of the ancients imagined him to be the same with that Obadiah that was steward to Ahab's household (1 Kings xviii. 3); and, if so, he that hid and fed the prophets had indeed a prophet's reward, when he was himself made a prophet. But that is a conjecture which has no ground. This Obadiah, it is probable, was of a later date, some think contemporary with Hosea, Joel, and Amos; others think he lived about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, when the children of Edom so barbarously triumphed in that destruction. However, what he wrote was what he saw; it is his *vision*. Probably there was much more which he was divinely inspired to speak, but this is all he was inspired to write; and all he writes is concerning Edom. It is a foolish fancy of some of the Jews that because he prophesies only concerning Edom he was himself an Edomite by birth, but a proselyte to the Jewish religion. Other prophets prophesied against Edom, and some of them seem to have borrowed from him in their predictions against Edom, as Jer. xlix. 7, &c.; Ezek. xxv. 12, &c. Out of the mouth of these two or three witnesses every word will be established.

This book is wholly concerning Edom, a nation nearly allied and near adjoining to Israel, and yet an enemy to the seed of Jacob, inheriting the enmity of their father Esau to Jacob. Now here we have, after the proface, ver. 1, I. Threatenings against Edom, 1. That their pride should be humbled, ver. 2-4. 2. That their wealth should be plundered, ver. 5-7. 3. That their wisdom should be infatuated, ver. 8, 9. 4. That their spiteful behaviour towards God's Israel should be avenged, ver. 10-16. II. Gracious promises to Israel; that they shall be restored and reformed, and shall be victorious over the Edomites, and become masters of their land and the lands of others of their neighbours (ver. 17-20), and that the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up by the bringing in of the great salvation, ver. 21.

THE vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord God concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. 2 Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised. 3 The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?

4 Though thou exalt *thyself* as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. 5 If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grape-gatherers came to thee, would they not leave *some* grapes? 6 How are the *things* of Esau searched out! *how* are his hidden things sought up! 7 All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee *even* to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; *they that eat thy bread* have laid a wound under thee: *there is none* understanding in him. 8 Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise *men* out of Edom, and under-

standing out of the mount of Esau? 9 And thy mighty *men*, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter.

Edom is the nation against which this prophecy is levelled, and which, some think, is put for all the enemies of Israel, that shall be brought down first or last. The rabbin by Edom understand Rome. Rome Christian they understand it of, and have an implacable enmity to it as such; but, if we understand it of Rome antichristian, we shall find the passages of it applicable enough. And though Edom was mortified in the times of the Maccabees, as it had been before by Jehoshaphat, yet its destruction seems to have been typical, as their father Esau's rejection, and to have had further reference to the destruction of the enemies of the gospel-church; for so shall all God's enemies perish; and we find (Isa. xxxiv. 5) *the sword of the Lord coming down upon Idumea*, to signify the general day of God's recompences for the controversy of Zion, v. 8. Some have well observed that it could not but be a great temptation to the people of Israel, when they saw themselves, who were the children of beloved Jacob, in trouble, and the Edomites, the seed of hated Esau, not only prospering, but triumphing over them in their troubles; and therefore God gives them a prospect of the destruction of Edom, which should be total and final, and of a happy issue of their own correction. Now we may observe here,

I. A declaration of war against Edom, (v. 1): "*We have heard a rumour, or rather an order, from the Lord, the God of hosts; he has given the word of command; it is his counsel and decree, which can neither be reversed nor resisted, that all who do mischief to his people shall certainly bring mischief upon themselves. We have heard a report that God is raised up out of his holy habitation, and is preparing his throne for judgment; and an ambassador is sent among the heathen,*" a herald rather, some minister or messenger of Providence, to alarm the nations, or the Lord's prophets, who gave each nation its burden. Those whom God employs cry to each other, *Arise ye*, stir up yourselves and one another, and let us rise up against Edom in battle. The confederate forces under Nebuchadnezzar thus animate themselves and one another to make a descent upon that country: *Gather yourselves together, and come against her*; so it is in the parallel place, Jer. xlix. 14. Note, When God has bloody work to do among the enemies of his church he will find out and fit up both hands and hearts to do it.

II. A prediction of the success of that war. Edom shall certainly be subdued, and spoiled, and brought down; for all her confidences shall fail her and stand her in no

stead, and in like manner shall all the enemies of God's church be disappointed in those things which they stayed themselves upon.

1. Do they depend upon their grandeur, the figure they make among the nations, their influence upon them, and interest in them? That shalt dwindle (v. 2): "*Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen*, so that none of thy neighbours will court thy friendship, or court an alliance with thee; *thou art greatly despised among them*, and looked upon with contempt, as an infatuated and unfaithful nation." And thus (v. 3) *the pride of thy heart has deceived thee*. Note, (1.) Those that think well of themselves are apt to fancy that others think well of them too; but, when they come to make trial of them, they will find themselves mistaken, and thus their pride deceives them and by it slays them. (2.) God can easily lay those low that have magnified and exalted themselves, and will find out a way to do it, for he *resists the proud*; and we often see those small and greatly despised who once looked very big and were greatly caressed and admired.

2. Do they depend upon the fortifications of their country, both by nature and art, and glory in the advantages they have thereby? Those also shall deceive them. They *dwelt in the clefts of the rock*, as an eagle in her nest, and their habitation was high, not only exalted above their neighbours, which was the matter of their pride, but fortified against their enemies, which was the matter of their security, so high as to be out of the reach of danger. Now observe, (1.) What Edom says in the pride of his heart: *Who shall bring me down to the ground?* He speaks with a confidence of his own strength, and a contempt of God's judgments, as if almighty power itself could not overpower him. As for *all his enemies*, even God himself, he *puffs at them* (Ps. x. 5), sets them all at defiance. Their father Esau had *sold his birthright*, and yet they lifted up themselves, as if to them had still pertained the *excellency of dignity and power*. Many forfeit their privileges, and yet boast of them. Because Edom is high and lifted up, he imagines none can bring him down. Note. Carnal security is a sin that most easily besets men in the day of their pomp, power, and prosperity, and does, as much as any thing, both ripen men for ruin and aggravate it when it comes. (2.) What God says to this, v. 4. If men will dare to challenge Omnipotence, their challenge shall be taken up: *Who shall bring me down?* says Edom. "*I will,*" says God. "*Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle that soars high and builds high, nay, though thou set thy nest among the stars, higher than ever any eagle flew, it is but in thy own imagination, and thence will I bring thee down.*" This we had Jer. xlix. 15, 16. Note, Sinners will certainly be made ashamed of their pride and security, of their pride



when it has a fall and of their security when their confidences fail their expectation.

3. Do they depend upon their wealth and treasure, the abundance of which is looked upon as the sinews of war? Is their money their defence? Is that their strong city? It is so only in their own conceit, for it shall rather expose them than protect them; it shall be made a prey to the enemy, and they for the sake of it, *v. 5, 6*. Much to this purport we had *Jer. xlix. 9, 10*. Only here comes in, in a parenthesis, *How art thou cut off! thou and all thy stores*. The prophet foretels it, but laments it, that the thread of their prosperity was cut off. How art thou fallen, and how great is thy fall! *How art thou stupified!* so the Chaldee words it. How senseless art thou under these desolating judgments, as if they were but common strokes! But he shows that it should be an utter ruin, not a usual calamity; for, (1.) It is indeed a usual calamity for those that have wealth to have it stolen, and to lose a little out of their great deal. *Thieves come to them* (for where the carcase is, there will the birds of prey be gathered together), *robbers come by night*, and they steal till they have enough, what they have occasion for, what they have a mind for; they steal no more than they think they can carry away, and out of a great stock it is scarcely missed. Those that rob orchards, or vineyards, carry off what they think fit; but they leave some grapes, some fruit for the owner, who easily bears his loss perhaps and soon recruits it. But, (2.) It shall not be so with Edom; his wealth shall all be taken away, and nothing shall escape the hands of the destroying army, not that which is most precious and valuable, *v. 6*. *How are the things of Esau*, the things he sets his heart upon and places his happiness in, his good things, his best things, how are these things, which were so carefully treasured up and concealed, now searched out by the enemy and seized! *How are his hidden things*, his hidden treasures, plundered, rifled, and sought up! His hoards, that had not seen the light for many years, are now a spoil to the enemy. Note, Treasures on earth, though ever so fast locked up and ever so artfully hidden, cannot be so safely laid up but that thieves may break through and steal; it is therefore our wisdom to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

4. Do they depend upon their alliances with neighbouring states and potentates? Those also shall fail them (*v. 7*): "The men of thy confederacy, all of them, the Ammonites and Moabites, and other thy high allies that were at peace with thee, that entered into a league offensive and defensive with thee, that solemnly engaged not only to do thee no hurt, but to do thee all the service they could, did eat thy bread, were magnificently treated and entertained by thee, lived upon thee; their soldiers had free quarter in thy country, and took pay as thy auxiliaries; they

brought thee even to the border of thy land, were very respectful to thy ambassadors, and brought them on their way home, even to the utmost limits of their country; they seemed forward to serve thee with their forces when thou hadst occasion for them, and came along with thee to the border, till thou wast just ready to engage the invading enemy; but then," (1.) "They have deceived thee; they flew back and retreated when thou wast in extremity, and proved as a broken reed to the traveller that is weary, and as the brooks in summer to the traveller that is thirsty; they bear no weight, yield no relief." Nay, (2.) They have prevailed against thee; they were too hard for thee in the treaty imposed upon thee, and by cheating thee ruined thee, brought thee into danger, and there left thee an easy prey to thy enemy." Note, Those that make flesh their arm arm it against them. Yet this was not the worst. (3.) "They have laid a wound under thee; that is, they have laid that under thee for a stay and support, for a foundation to rely on, for a pillow to repose on, which will prove a wound to thee; not as thorns only, but as swords." If God lay under us the arms of his power and love, these will be firm and easy under us; the God of our covenant will never deceive us. But if we trust to the men of our confederacy, and what they will lay under us, it may prove to us a wound and dishonour. And observe the just censure here passed upon Edom for trusting to those who thus played tricks with him: "There is no understanding in him, or else he would never have put it into their power to betray him by putting such a confidence in them. Note, Those show they have no understanding in them who, when they are encouraged to trust in the Creator, put a cheat upon themselves by reposing a confidence in the creature.

5. Do they depend upon the politics of their counsellors? These shall fail them, *v.*

8. Edom had been famous for great statesmen, men of learning and experience, that sat at the helm of government, and were masters of all the arts of management, that in all treaties used to outwit their neighbours; but now the counsellors have become fools, and the wise God makes them so: *Shall I not in that day destroy the wise men out of Edom?* As men they shall fall by the sword in common with others (*Ps. xlix. 10*), and their wisdom shall not secure them; as wise men they shall be infatuated in all their counsels; their best-laid designs shall be baffled, their measures broken, and those very projects by which they thought to establish themselves and the public interests shall be the ruin of both. Thus wisdom perishes from Teman, as it is in the parallel place, *Jer. xlix. 7*. This was, (1.) The just punishment of their folly in trusting to an arm of flesh: *There is no understanding in them, v. 7*. They have not sense to trust in

a living God, and a God of truth, but put confidence in men that are frail, fickle, and false; and therefore God will *destroy their understanding*. Note, God will justly deny those understanding to keep out of the way of danger that will not use their understanding to keep out of the way of sin. He that will be foolish, let him be foolish still. (2.) It was the forerunner of their destruction. A nation is certainly marked for ruin when God hides the things that belong to its peace from the eyes of those that are entrusted with its counsels. *Quos Deus vult perdere, eos dementat*—God infatuates those whom he designs to destroy. Job xii. 17.

6. Do they depend upon the strength and courage of their soldiers? They are not only able-bodied, but men of spirit and courage, that can face an enemy and stand their ground; but now (v. 9). *Thy mighty men, O Teman! shall be dismayed*; their courage shall fail them, *to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter*, and none escape. The weak, and feeble, and unarmed must fall of course into the hand of the destroyer when the *mighty men are dismayed*, and not only lose the day, but lose their lives, because they have lost their spirit. *Howl, fir-trees, if the cedars be shaken*. Note, The death or disuniting of the mighty often proves the death and destruction of the many; and it is in vain to depend upon mighty men for our protection if we have not an almighty God for us, much less if we have an almighty God against us.

10 For *thy* violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. 11 In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. 12 But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. 13 Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid *hands* on their substance in the day of their calamity; 14 Neither shouldest thou have stood in the cross-way, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest

thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. 15 For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head. 16 For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

When we have read Edom's doom, no less than utter ruin, it is natural to ask, *Why, what evil has he done?* What is the ground of God's controversy with him? Many things, no doubt, were amiss in Edom; they were a sinful people, and a *people laden with iniquity*. But that one single crime which is laid to their charge, as filling their measure and bringing this ruin upon them, that for which they here stand indicted, of which they are convicted, and for which they are condemned, is the injury they had done to the people of God (v. 10): "It is *for thy violence against thy brother Jacob*, that ancient and hereditary grudge which thou hast borne to the people of Israel, that all this *shame shall cover thee* and *thou shalt be cut off for ever*." Note, Injuries to men are affronts to God, the righteous God, that loveth righteousness and hateth wickedness; and, as the Judge of all the earth, he will give redress to those that suffer wrong and take vengeance on those that do wrong. All violence, all *unrighteousness, is sin*; but it is a great aggravation of the violence if it be done either, 1. Against any of our own people; it is violence *against thy brother*, thy near relation, to whom thou shouldst be a *goël*—a redeemer, whom it is thy duty to right if others wronged him; how wicked is it then for thee thyself to wrong him! Thou *slandereest* and abusest *thy own mother's son*; this makes the sin *exceedingly sinful*, Ps. 1. 20. Or, 2. Much more if it be done against any of God's people; "it is thy brother Jacob that is in covenant with God, and dear to him. Thou hatest him whom God has loved, and because God has loved him, him whose cause God espouses and will plead with jealousy, and in whose interests God is pleased so far to interest himself that he takes the violence done to him as done to himself. *Whoso touches Jacob touches the apple of the eye of Jacob's God*." So that it is *crimen læsæ majestatis*—high treason, for which, as for high treason, let Edom expect an ignominious punishment: *Shame shall cover thee*, and a ruining one; *thou shalt be cut off for ever*.

In the following verses we are told more particularly,

I. What the violence was which Edom



did against his brother Jacob, and what are the proofs of this charge. It does not appear that the Edomites did themselves invade Israel, but that was more for want of power than will; they had malice enough to lo it, but were not a match for them. But that which is laid to their charge is their barbarous conduct towards Judah and Jerusalem when they were in distress, and ready to be destroyed, probably by the Chaldeans, or upon occasion of some other of the calamities of the Jews; for this seems to have been always their temper towards them. See this charged upon the Edomites (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), that *in the day of Jerusalem they said, Rase it, rase it*, and Ezek. xxv. 12. They are here told particularly what they did, by being told what they should not have done (v. 12—14): “*Thou shouldst not have looked, thou shouldst not have entered*; but thou didst do so.” Note, In reflecting upon ourselves it is good to compare what we have done with what we should have done, our practice with the rule, that we may discover wherein we have done amiss, have *done those things which we ought not to have done*. We should not have been where we were at such a time, should not have been in such and such company, should not have said what we said, nor have taken the liberty that we took. Sin thus looked upon, in the glass of the commandment, will appear exceedingly sinful. Let us see,

1. What was the case of Judah and Jerusalem when the Edomites behaved themselves thus basely and insulted over them. (1.) It was a day of distress with them (v. 12): It was the *day of their calamity*, so it is called three times, v. 13. With the Edomites it was a day of prosperity and peace when with the Israelites it was a day of distress and calamity, for judgment commonly *begins at the house of God*. Children are corrected when strangers are let alone. (2.) It was the *day of their destruction* (v. 12), when both city and country were laid waste, were laid *in ruins*. (3.) It was a day when *foreigners entered into the gates of Jerusalem*, when the city, after a long siege, was broken up, and the great officers of the king of Babylon’s army came, and sat in the gates, as judges of the land; when they cast lots upon the spoils of Jerusalem, as the soldiers on Christ’s garments, what shares each of the conquerors shall have, what share of the lands, what share of the goods; or they cast lots to determine when and where they should attack it. (4.) It was a day when the *strangers carried away captive his forces* (v. 11), took the men of war prisoners of war, and carried them off, in poverty and shame, to their own country, or such a multitude of captives that they were as an army. (5.) “It was a day when thy brother himself, that had long been at home, at rest in his own land, *became a stranger*, an exile in a strange land.” Now, when this was

the woeful case of the Jews, the Edomites, their neighbours and brethren, should have pitied them and helped them, condoled with them and comforted them, and should have trembled to think that their own turn would come next; for, *if this was done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* But,

2. See what was the conduct of the Edomites towards them when they were in this distress, for which they are here condemned. (1.) They looked with pleasure upon the affliction of God’s people; they *stood on the other side* (v. 11), afar off, when they should have come in to the relief of their distressed neighbours, and *looked upon them*, and *their day, looked on their affliction* (v. 12, 13), with a careless unconcerned eye, as the priest and Levite looked upon the wounded man, and *passed by on the other side*. Those have a great deal to answer for that are idle spectators of the troubles and afflictions of their neighbours, when they are capable of being their active helpers. But this was not all; they looked upon it with a scornful eye, with an eye of complacency and satisfaction; they looked and laughed to see Israel in distress, saying, *Aha! so would we have it*. They fed their eyes with the rueful spectacle of Jerusalem’s ruin, and looked at it as those that had long looked for it and often wished to see it. Note, We must take heed with what eye we look upon the afflictions of our brethren; and, if we cannot look upon them with a gracious eye of sympathy and tenderness, it is better not to look upon them at all: *Thou shouldst not have looked as thou didst upon the day of thy brother*. (2.) They triumphed and insulted over them, upbraided their brethren with their sorrows, and made themselves and their companions merry with them. They *rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction*. They had not the good manners to conceal the pleasure they took in Judah’s destruction and to dissemble it, but openly declared it, and rudely and insolently declared it *to them*; they *rejoiced over them*, crowded, and hectoring, and trampled upon them. Those have the spirit of Edomites that can rejoice over any, especially over Israelites, in the day of their calamity. (3.) They *spoke proudly—magnified the mouth* (so the word is), against Israel, talked with a great disdain of the suffering Israelites, and with an air of haughtiness of the present safety and prosperity of Edom, as if it might be inferred from their present different state that the tables were turned, and now Esau was beloved, and the favourite of heaven, and Jacob hated and rejected. Note, Those must expect to be in some way or other effectually humbled and mortified themselves that are puffed up and made proud by the humiliations and mortifications of others. (4.) They went further yet, for they *entered into the gate of God’s people in the*



day of their calamity, and *laid hands on their substance*. Though they did not help to conquer them, they helped to plunder them, and put in for a share in the prey, *v. 13*. Jerusalem was thrown open, and then they entered in; its wealth was thrown about, and they seized it for themselves, excusing it with this, that they might as well take it as let it be lost; whereas it was taking what was not their own. Babylon lays Jerusalem waste, but Edom, by meddling with the spoil, becomes *particeps criminis*—*partaker of the crime*, and shall be reckoned with as an accessory *ex post facto*—*after the fact*. Note, Those do but impoverish themselves that think to enrich themselves by the ruins of the people of God; and those deceive themselves who think they may call all that substance their own which they can lay their hands on in a day of calamity. (5.) They did yet worse things; they not only robbed their brethren, but murdered them, in the day of their calamity; *laid hands not only on their substance, but on their persons, v. 14*. When the victorious sword of the Chaldeans was making bloody work among the Jews many made their escape, and were in a fair way to save themselves by flight; but the Edomites basely intercepted them, *stood in the cross-way* where several roads met, by each of which the trembling Israelites were making the best of their way from the fury of the pursuers, and there they stopped them: some they barbarously and coward-like cut off themselves; others they took prisoners, and delivered up to the pursuers, only to ingratiate themselves with them, because they were now the conquerors. They *should not have been thus cruel* to those that lay at their mercy, and never had done, nor were ever likely to do, them any hurt; they should not have betrayed those whom they had such a fair opportunity to protect; but such are the *tender mercies of the wicked*. One cannot read this without a high degree of compassion towards those who were thus basely abused, who when they fled from the sword of an open enemy, and thought they had got out of the reach of it, fell upon and fell by the sword of a treacherous neighbour, whom they were not apprehensive of any danger from. Nor can one read this without a high degree of indignation towards those who were so perfectly lost to all humanity as to exercise such cruelty upon such proper objects of compassion. (6.) In all this they joined with the open enemies and persecutors of Israel: *Even thou wast as one of them*, an accessory equally guilty with the principals. He that joins in with evil doers, and is aiding and abetting in their evil deeds, shall be reckoned, and shall be reckoned with, as one of them.

II. What the shame is that shall cover them for this violence of theirs. 1. They shall soon find that the cup is going round, even the cup of trembling; and, when they

come to be in the same calamitous condition that the Israel of God is now in, they will be ashamed to remember how they triumphed over them (*v. 15*): *The day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen*, when God will recompense tribulation to the troublers of his church. Though judgment begin at the house of God, it shall not end there. This should effectually restrain us from triumphing over others in their misery, that we know not how soon it may be our own case. 2. Their enmity to the people of God, and the injuries they have done them, shall be recompensed into their own bosoms: *As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee*. The righteous God will render both to nations and to particular persons *according to their works*; and the punishment is often made exactly to answer to the sin, and those that have abused others come to be themselves abused in like manner. The just and jealous God will find out a time and way to avenge the wrongs done to his people on those that have been injurious to them. *As you have drunk upon my holy mountain (v. 16)*, that is, as God's professing people, who inhabit his holy mountain, have drunk deeply of the cup of affliction (and their being of the holy mountain would not excuse them), *so shall all the heathen drink*, in their turn, of the same bitter cup; for, if God *bring evil on the city that is called by his name, shall those be unpunished* that never knew his name? See Jer. xxv. 29. And it is part of the burden of Edom (Jer. xlix. 12), *Those whose judgment was not to drink of the cup* (who had reason to promise themselves an exemption from it) have assuredly drunken, and *shall Edom that is the generation of God's wrath go unpunished?* No, *thou shalt surely drink of it; the cup of trembling shall be taken out of the hand of God's people, and put into the hand of those that afflict them*, Isa. li. 22, 23. Nay, they may expect their case to be worse in the day of their distress than that of Israel was in their day; for, (1.) The afflictions of God's people were but for a moment, and soon had an end, but their enemies shall *drink continually the wine of God's wrath*, Rev. xiv. 10. (2.) The dregs of the cup are reserved for the *wicked of the earth* (Ps. lxxv. 8); they shall *drink and swallow down, or sup up* (as the margin reads it), shall drink it to the bottom. (3.) The people of God, though they may be made to drink of the wine of astonishment for a while (Ps. lx. 3), shall yet recover, and come to themselves again; but the heathen shall drink and be *as though they had not been*; there shall be neither any remains nor any remembrance of them, but they shall be wholly extirpated and rooted out. *So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!* so they shall perish, if they turn not.

17 But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holi-



ness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. 18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be *any* remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken *it*. 19 And *they* of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and *they* of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin *shall possess* Gilead. 20 And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel *shall possess* that of the Canaanites, *even* unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south. 21 And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

After the destruction of the church's enemies is threatened, which will be completely accomplished in the great day of recompence, and that judgment for which Christ came once, and will come again, into this world, here follow precious promises of the salvation of the church, with which this prophecy concludes, as those of Joel and Amos did, which, however they might be in part fulfilled in the return of the Jews out of Babylon notwithstanding the triumphs of Edom in their captivity, as if it were perpetual, are yet, doubtless, to have their full accomplishment in that great salvation wrought out by Jesus Christ, to which all the prophets bore witness. It is promised here,

I. That there shall be salvation upon Mount Zion, that holy hill where God sets his anointed King (Ps. ii. 6): *Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance*, v. 17. There shall be *those that escape*; so the margin. A remnant of Israel, *upon the holy mountain*, shall be saved, v. 16. Christ said, *Salvation is of the Jews*, John iv. 22. God wrought deliverances for the Jews, typical of our redemption by Christ. But Mount Zion is the gospel-church, from which the New-Testament law *went forth*, Isa. ii. 3. There salvation shall be preached and prayed for; to the gospel-church those are added *who shall be saved*; and for those who come in faith and hope to this Mount Zion deliverance shall be wrought from wrath and the curse, from sin, and death, and hell, while those who continue afar off shall be left to perish.

II. That, where there is salvation, there shall be sanctification in order to it: *And*

*there shall be holiness*, to prepare and qualify the children of Zion for this deliverance; for wherever God designs glory he gives grace. Temporal deliverances are indeed wrought for us in mercy when with them there is holiness, when there is wrought in us a disposition to receive them with love and gratitude to God; when we are sanctified, they are sanctified to us. Holiness is itself a great deliverance, and an earnest of that eternal salvation which we look for. *There*, upon Mount Zion, in the gospel-church, *shall be holiness*; for that is it which *becomes God's house for ever*, and the great design of the gospel, and its grace, is to plant and promote holiness. There shall be the Holy Spirit, the holy ordinances, the holy Jesus, and a select remnant of holy souls, in whom, and among whom, the holy God will delight to dwell. Note, Where there is holiness there shall be deliverance.

III. That this salvation and sanctification shall spread, and prevail, and get ground in the world: *The house of Jacob*, even this *Mount Zion*, with the deliverance and the holiness there wrought, shall *possess their possessions*; that is, the gospel-church shall be set up among the heathen, and shall replenish the earth; the apostles of Christ by their preaching shall gain possession of the hearts of men for him whose messengers and ministers they are, and when they possess their hearts they shall *possess their possessions*, for those who have given up themselves to the Lord give up all they have to him. When Lydia's heart was opened to Christ her house was opened to his ministers. When the Gentile nations became *nations of those that were saved*, were disciplined, *walked in the light of the Lord*, and *brought their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem* (Rev. xxi. 24), then the *house of Jacob possessed their possessions*. This is in part fulfilled by the planting of the Christian religion in the world, and shall be fulfilled yet more and more by the setting up of Christ's throne where Satan's seat is, and the erecting of the trophies of his victory upon the ruins of the devil's kingdom. Now here is foretold,

1. How this possession shall be *gained*, and the opposition given to it got over (v. 18): *The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame*, for their God is, and will be, a *consuming fire*; and the house of Esau shall be for *stubble*, easily devoured and consumed by this fire. This is fulfilled, (1.) In the conversion of multitudes by the grace of Christ; the gospel, preached in the house of Jacob and Joseph, and there owned and professed, shall be as a fire and a flame to melt and to soften hard hearts, to burn up the dross of sin and corruption, that they may be purified and refined with the *spirit of judgment* and the *spirit of burning*. Christ, when he comes, shall be as a *refiner's fire*, Mal. iii. 1. 2. (2.) In the confusion of all the impenitent implacable enemies of the gospel of



Christ, that oppose it and do all they can to hinder the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah by it. The gospel day is a day that *burns like an oven*, in which *all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble*, Mal. iv. 1. Jacob and Joseph shall be as a fire and a flame; for those that meddle with them, to do them hurt, will find that they do so at their peril; they shall be to them as *a torch of fire in a sheaf*, Zech. xii. 6. The word of God in the mouth of his ministers is said to be like fire, and the people as wood to be devoured by it, Jer. v. 14. And the *man of sin* is to be *consumed by the breath of Christ's mouth*, 2 Thess. ii. 8. Those that are not refined as gold by the fire of the gospel shall be consumed as dross by it; for it will be a savour either of life or of death. When idols and idolatry were abolished, and the wealth and power of the nations were brought into the service of Christ and his gospel, and the spoils of the *strong man armed* were divided by him that was *stronger than he*, then the house of Jacob and Joseph devoured the *house of Esau*, so that there was none of them left remaining. This the *Lord spoke* by his prophets, and this he did by his apostles.

2. How far this possession shall extend, v. 19, 20. This is described in Jewish language, which speaks the accession made to the land of Israel, after the return out of captivity in Babylon. The *captivity of this host of Israel*, that is, this host of Israel that have been so long in captivity and now they have come back are still called the *children of the captivity*, these shall not only recover their own land, but shall gain ground upon their neighbours adjoining to them, some of whom shall become proselytes and shall incorporate with the Jews, who, by possessing them in a holy communion, possess their land. We must reckon ourselves truly enriched by the conversion of our neighbours to the fear of God and the faith of Christ, and their coming to join with us in the worship of God. Such an accession to our Christian communion we must reckon to be more our wealth and strength than an accession to our estates. Or, The ancient inhabitants of those lands that were carried away into captivity being lost, and never returning to their estates, the children of Israel shall take possession of that which lies next them; for their numbers shall so increase that their own land shall be too strait for them, and their neighbours' estates shall escheat to them *ob defectum sanguinis—through default of heirs*. They shall enter upon that which is adjoining to them. The country of Esau shall be possessed by those of the south parts of Canaan, for to them it lies contiguous. Those of the plain, on the west of Canaan, which was a champaign country, shall enter upon the land of the Philistines, their neighbours. Those of Judah, which was the chief of the two returning tribes shall possess the field of Ephraim and

Samaria, which before belonged to the ten tribes; and Benjamin, the other tribe, shall possess Gilead on the other side Jordan, which had belonged to the two tribes and a half. The kingdom of Israel shall join with that of Judah both in civil and sacred interests, and, as friends and brethren, shall mutually possess and enjoy one another; and both together shall possess the Canaanites, even to Zarephath, which *belongeth to Zidon*; and Jerusalem shall possess the *cities of the south*, even to Sepharad. Thus did the Jews enlarge their borders on all sides. The modern rabbin teach their scholars by Zarephath and Sepharad to understand France and Spain, grounding upon this a foolish groundless expectation that some time or other the Jews shall be masters of those countries; and they call and count the Christians *Edomites*, over whom they are to have dominion. But the promise here, no doubt, has a spiritual signification, and had its accomplishment in the setting up of the Christian church, the gospel-Israel, in the world, and shall have its accomplishment more and more in the enlargement of it and the additions made to it, till the mystical body is completed. When ministers and Christians prevail with their neighbours to come to Christ, to yield themselves to the Lord, they possess them. The converts that Abraham made are said to be the *souls that he had gotten*, Gen. xii. 5. The possession is gained, not *vi et armis—by force and arms*; for the *weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual*; it is by the preaching of the gospel, and the power of divine grace going along with it, that this possession is got and kept.

IV. That the kingdom of the Redeemer shall be erected and maintained, to the comfort of his loyal subjects and the terror and shame of all his enemies (v. 21): *The kingdom shall be the Lord's*, the Lord Christ's. God shall give it to him, by putting all things into his hand, all power both in heaven and in earth; men shall give it to him, by resigning themselves to him as his willing people, and appointing him their head. Now the work of kings is to protect their subjects and suppress their enemies; and this Christ will do; he will both reward and punish. 1. The mountain of Zion shall be saved; on it *saviours shall come*, the preachers of the gospel, who are called saviours, because their business is to save themselves and those that hear them; and in this they are *workers together with Christ*, but to little purpose if he by his grace did not *work together with them*. 2. The mountain of Esau shall be judged; and the same that come as saviours on Mount Zion shall *judge the mountain of Esau*; for the word of the gospel in their mouth, that saves believers, judges unbelievers, convinces and condemns them. Christ's ministers are *saviours on Mount Zion* when they preach that *he that believes shall be saved*; but they judge the mount of Esau when they preach



that he *that believeth not shall be damned*, which they are not only commissioned, but commanded to do, Mark xvi. 16. And in the course of God's providence his scripture is fulfilled; when God raises up friends to the church in her distress (as he *raised up judges* to deliver Israel of old, Judg. ii. 16), then *saviours come on Mount Zion*, to save it from being sunk and ruined; and when the enemies of the church are brought down,

and their power broken, then is the *mount of Esau judged*; and this shall be done in every age in such a way as God thinks best; we may depend upon it that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, but the church shall prevail against them; *for the kingdom shall be the Lord's*; the kingdoms of the world shall become his, and he has taken, and will take, to himself his great power and reign.

## EXPOSITION,

### WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE BOOK OF

## J O N A H.

THIS book of Jonah, though it be placed here in the midst of the prophetic books of scripture, is yet rather a history than a prophecy; one line of prediction there is in it, *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*; the rest of the book is a narrative of the preface to and the consequences of that prediction. In the midst of the obscure prophecies before and after this book, wherein are many things dark and hard to be understood, which are puzzling to the learned, and are *strong meat for strong men*, comes in this plain and pleasant story, which is entertaining to the weakest, and *milk for babes*. Probably Jonah was himself the penman of this book, and he, as Moses and other inspired penmen, records his own faults, which is an evidence that in these writings they designed God's glory and not their own. We read of this same Jonah 2 Kings xiv. 25, where we find that he was of Gath-hepher in Galilee, a city that belonged to the tribe of Zebulun, in a remote corner of the land of Israel; for the Spirit, which, like the wind, *blows where it listeth*, will as easily find out Jonah in Galilee as Isaiah at Jerusalem. We find also that he was a messenger of mercy to Israel in the reign of Jeroboam the second; for the success of his arms, in the *restoring of the coast of Israel*, is said to be *according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah the prophet*. Those prophecies were not committed to writing, but this against Nineveh was, chiefly for the sake of the story that depends upon it, and that is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ, of whom Jonah was a type; it contains also very remarkable instances of human infirmity in Jonah, and of God's mercy both in pardoning repenting sinners, witness Nineveh, and in bearing with repining saints, witness Jonah.

#### CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, I. A command given to Jonah to preach at Nineveh, ver. 1, 2. II. Jonah's disobedience to that command, ver. 3. III. The pursuit and arrest of him for that disobedience by a storm, in which he was asleep, ver. 4—6. IV. The discovery of him, and his disobedience, to be the cause of the storm, ver. 7—10. V. The casting of him into the sea, for the stilling of the storm, ver. 11—16. VI. The miraculous preservation of his life there in the belly of a fish (ver. 17), which was his reservation for further services.

**N**OW the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Observe, 1. The honour God put upon Jonah, in giving him a commission to go and prophesy against Nineveh. *Jonah* signifies

a dove, a proper name for all God's prophets, all his people, who ought to be harmless as doves, and to mourn as doves for the sins and calamities of the land. His father's name was *Amitai—My truth*; for God's prophets should be sons of truth. To him the word of the Lord came—to him it was (so the word signifies), for God's word is a real thing; men's words are but wind, but God's words are substance. He had been before acquainted with the word of the Lord, and knew his voice from that of a stranger; the orders now given him were, *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, v. 2.* Nineveh was at this time the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy, an eminent city (Gen. x. 11), a great city, that great city, forty-eight miles in compass (some make it much more), great in the number of the inhabitants, as appears by the multitude of infants in it (*ch.* iv. 11), great in wealth (there was no end of its store, Nah. ii. 9), great in power and dominion; it was the city that for some time ruled over the kings of the earth. But great cities, as well as great men, are under God's government and judgment. Nineveh was a great city, and yet a heathen city, without the knowledge and worship of the true God. How many great cities and great nations are there that sit in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death! This great city was a wicked city: *Their wickedness has come up before me* (their malice, so some read it); *their wickedness was presumptuous*, and they sinned with a high hand. It is sad to think what a great deal of sin is committed in great cities, where there are many sinners, who are not only all sinners, but making one another sin. *Their wickedness has come up*, that is, it has come to a high degree, to the highest pitch; *the measure of it is full to the brim*; *their wickedness has come up*, and then it is time for vengeance to come down. Or, *The cry of their wickedness has come up*, as that of Sodom, Gen. xviii. 20, 21. It has come up before me—to my face (so the word is); it is a bold and open affront to God; it is sinning against him, in his sight; therefore Jonah must cry against it; he must witness against their great wickedness, and must warn them of the destruction that was coming upon them for it. God is coming forth against it, and he sends Jonah before, to proclaim war, and to sound an alarm. *Cry aloud, spare not.* He must not whisper his message in a corner, but publish it in the streets of Nineveh; he that has ears to hear let him hear what God has to say by his prophet against that wicked city. When the cry of sin comes up to God the cry of vengeance comes out against the sinner. He must go to Nineveh, and cry there upon the spot against the wickedness of it. Other prophets were ordered to send messages to the neighbouring nations, and the prophecy of Nahum is particularly the burden of Nineveh; but Jonah must go and carry the message himself:

*“Arise quickly; apply thyself to the business with speed and courage, and the resolution that becomes a prophet; arise, and go to Nineveh.”* Those that go on God's errands must rise and go, must stir up themselves to the work cut out for them. The prophets were sent first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet not to them only; they had the children's bread, but Nineveh eats of the crumbs. 2. The dishonour Jonah did to God in refusing to obey his orders, and to go on the errand on which he was sent (*v.* 3): But Jonah, instead of rising to go to Nineveh, rose up to flee to Tarshish, to the sea, not bound for any port, but desirous to get away from the presence of the Lord; and, if he might but do that, he cared not whither he went, not as if he thought he could go any where from under the eye of God's inspection, but from his special presence, from the spirit of prophecy, which, when it put him upon this work, he thought himself haunted with, and coveted to get out of the hearing of. Some think Jonah went upon the opinion of some of the Jews that the spirit of prophecy was confined to the land of Israel (which in Ezekiel and Daniel was effectually proved to be a mistake), and therefore he hoped he should get clear of it if he could but get out of the borders of that land. (1.) Jonah would not go to Nineveh to cry against it either because it was a long and dangerous journey thither, and in a road he knew not, or because he was afraid it would be as much as his life was worth to deliver such an ungrateful message to that great and potent city. He consulted with flesh and blood, and declined the embassy because he could not go with safety, or because he was jealous for the prerogatives of his country, and not willing that any other nation should share in the honour of divine revelation; he feared it would be the beginning of the removal of the kingdom of God from the Jews to another nation, that would bring forth more of the fruits of it. He owns himself (*ch.* iv. 2) that the reason of his aversion to this journey was because he foresaw that the Ninevites would repent, and God would forgive them and take them into favour, which would be a slur upon the people of Israel, who had been so long a peculiar people to God. (2.) He therefore went to Tarshish, to Tarsus in Cilicia (so some), probably because he had friends and relations there, with whom he hoped for some time to sojourn. He went to Joppa, a famous seaport in the land of Israel, in quest of a ship bound for Tarshish, and there he found one. Providence seemed to favour his design, and give him an opportunity to escape. We may be out of the way of duty and yet may meet with a favourable gale. The ready way is not always the right way. He found the ship just ready to weigh anchor perhaps, and to set sail for Tarshish, and so he lost no time. Or, perhaps, he went to Tarshish because he found the ship



going thither; otherwise all places were alike to him. He did not think himself out of his way, the way he would go, provided he was not in his way, the way he should go. So he *paid the fare thereof*; for he did not regard the charge, so he could but gain his point, and get to a distance *from the presence of the Lord*. He went *with them*, with the mariners, with the passengers, with the merchants, whoever they were that were going to Tarshish. Jonah, forgetting his dignity as well as duty, herded with them, and *went down* into the ship to go *with them to Tarshish*. See what the best of men are when God leaves them to themselves, and what need we have, when the *word of the Lord* comes to us, to have the *Spirit of the Lord* come along with the word, to bring every thought within us into obedience to it. The prophet Isaiah owns that *therefore* he was not *rebellious*, neither *turned away back*, because God not only spoke to him, but *opened his ear*, Isa. l. 5. Let us learn hence to *cease from man*, and not to be too confident either of ourselves or others in a time of trial; but let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. 6 So the ship-master came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. 7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. 8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou? 9 And he said unto them, I *am* a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry *land*. 10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that

he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

When Jonah was set on ship-board, and under sail for Tarshish, he thought himself safe enough; but here we find him pursued and overtaken, discovered and convicted as a deserter from God, as one that had *run his colours*.

I. God sends a pursuer after him, *a mighty tempest in the sea*, v. 4. God has the *winds in his treasure* (Ps. cxxxv. 7), and out of these treasures God *sent forth*, he *cast forth* (so the word is), with force and violence, *a great wind into the sea*; even *stormy winds fulfil his word*, and are often the messengers of his wrath; he *gathers the winds in his fist* (Prov. xxx. 4), where he holds them, and whence he squeezes them when he pleases; for though, as to us, the *wind blows where it listeth*, yet not as to God, but where he directs. The effect of this wind was *a mighty tempest*; for when the winds rise the waves rise. Note, Sin brings storms and tempests into the soul, into the family, into churches and nations; it is a disquieting disturbing thing. The tempest prevailed to such a degree that *the ship was likely to be broken*; the mariners expected no other; *that ship* (so some read it), that and no other. Other ships were upon the same sea at the same time, yet, it should seem, that ship in which Jonah was was tossed more than any other and was more in danger. This wind was sent after Jonah, to fetch him back again to God and to his duty; and it is a great mercy to be reclaimed and called home when we go astray, though it be by a tempest.

II. The ship's crew were alarmed by this mighty tempest, but Jonah only, the person concerned, was unconcerned, v. 5. The mariners were affected with their danger, though it was not with them that God had this controversy. 1. They were *afraid*; though, their business leading them to be very much conversant with dangers of this kind, they used to make light of them, yet now the oldest and stoutest of them began to tremble, being apprehensive that there was something more than ordinary in this tempest, so suddenly did it rise, so strongly did it rage. Note, God can strike a terror upon the most daring, and make even *great men and chief captains* call for shelter from rocks and mountains. 2. They *cried every man unto his god*; this was the effect of their fear. Many will not be brought to prayer till they are frightened to it; he that would learn to pray, let him go to sea. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee*. Every man of them prayed; they were not some praying and others reviling, but every man engaged; as the danger was general, so was the address to heaven; there was not one praying for them all, but every one for himself. They *cried every man to his god*, the god of his country or city, or his own tutelar deity; it



is a testimony against atheism that every man had a god, and had the belief of a God; but it is an instance of the folly of paganism that they had gods many, every man the god he had a fancy for, whereas there can be but one God, there needs be no more. But, though they had lost that dictate of the light of nature that there is but *one God*, they still were governed by that direction of the law of nature that God is to be prayed to (*Should not a people seek unto their God?* Isa. viii. 19), and that he is especially to be prayed to when we are in distress and danger. *Call upon me in the time of trouble. Is any afflicted? Is any frightened? Let him pray.* 3. Their prayers for deliverance were seconded with endeavours, and, having called upon their gods to help them, they did what they could to help themselves; for that is the rule, *Help thyself and God will help thee.* They cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them, as Paul's mariners in a like case cast forth even the tackling of the ship, and the wheat, Acts xxvii. 18, 19, 38. They were making a trading voyage, as it should seem, and were laden with many goods and much merchandise, by which they hoped to get gain; but now they are content to suffer loss by throwing them all overboard, to save their lives. See how powerful the natural love of life is. *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for it.* And shall we not put a like value upon the spiritual life, the life of the soul, reckoning that the gain of all the world cannot countervail the loss of the soul? See the vanity of worldly wealth, and the uncertainty of its continuance with us. Riches make themselves wings and fly away; nay, and the case may be such that we may be under a necessity of making wings for them, and driving them away, as here, when they could not be kept for the owners thereof but to their hurt, so that they themselves are glad to be rid of them, and sink that which otherwise would sink them, though they have no prospect of ever recovering it. Oh that men would be thus wise for their souls, and would be willing to part with that wealth, pleasure, and honour which they cannot keep without making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience and ruining their souls for ever! Those that thus quit their temporal interests for the securing of their spiritual welfare will be unspeakable gainers at last; for what they lose upon those terms they shall find again to life eternal. But where is Jonah all this while? One would have expected him busier than any there, but we find him gone down into his cabin, nay, into the hold, between the sides of the ship, and there he lies, and is fast asleep; neither the noise without, nor the sense of guilt within, awoke him. Perhaps for some time before he had avoided sleeping, for fear of God's speaking to him again in a dream; and now that he imagined himself out of the reach of that

danger he slept so much the more soundly. Note, Sin is of a stupifying nature, and we are concerned to take heed lest at any time our hearts be hardened by the deceitfulness of it. It is the policy of Satan, when by his temptations he has drawn men from God and their duty, to rock them asleep in carnal security, that they may not be sensible of their misery and danger. It concerns us all to watch therefore.

III. The master of the ship called Jonah up to his prayers, v. 6. The ship-master came to him, and bade him for shame get up, both to pray for life and to prepare for death; he gave him, 1. A just and necessary chiding: *What meanest thou, O sleeper?* Here we commend the ship-master, who gave him this reproof; for, though he was a stranger to him, he was, for the present, as one of his family; and whoever has a precious soul we must help, as we can, to save it from death. We pity Jonah, who needed this reproof; as a prophet of the Lord, if he had been in his place, he might have been reproving the king of Nineveh, but, being out of the way of his duty, he does himself lie open to the reproofs of a sorry ship-master. See how men by their sin and folly diminish themselves and make themselves mean. Yet we must admire God's goodness in sending him this seasonable reproof, for it was the first step towards his recovery, as the crowing of the cock was to Peter. Note, Those that sleep in a storm may well be asked what they mean. 2. A pertinent word of advice: *Arise, call upon thy God;* we are here crying every man to his god, why dost not thou get up and cry to thine? Art not thou equally concerned with the rest both in the danger dreaded and in the deliverance desired? Note, The devotions of others should quicken ours; and those who hope to share in a common mercy ought in all reason to contribute their quota towards the prayers and supplications that are made for it. In times of public distress, if we have any interest at the throne of grace, we ought to improve it for the public good. And the servants of God themselves have sometimes need to be called and stirred up to this part of their duty. 3. A good reason for this advice: *If so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.* It should seem, the many gods they called upon were considered by them only as mediators between them and the supreme God, and intercessors for them with him; for the ship-master speaks of one God still, from whom he expected relief. To engage prayer, he suggested that the danger was very great and imminent: "We are all likely to perish; there is but a step between us and death, and that just ready to be stepped." Yet he suggested that there was some hope remaining that their destruction might be prevented and they might not perish. While there is life there is hope, and while there is hope there is room for prayer.



He suggested also that it was God only that could effect their deliverance, and it must come from his power and his pity. "If he think upon us, and act for us, we may yet be saved." And therefore to him we must look, and in him we must put our trust, when the danger is ever so imminent.

IV. Jonah is found out to be the cause of the storm.

1. The mariners observed so much peculiar and uncommon either in the storm itself or in their own distress by it that they concluded it was a messenger of divine justice sent to arrest some one of those that were in that ship, as having been guilty of some enormous crime, judging as the barbarous people (Acts xxviii. 4), "*no doubt one of us is a murderer, or guilty of sacrilege, or perjury, or the like, who is thus pursued by the vengeance of the sea, and it is for his sake that we all suffer.*" Even the light of nature teaches that in extraordinary judgments the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against some extraordinary sins and sinners. Whatever evil is upon us at any time we must conclude *there is a cause* for it; there is evil done by us, or else this evil would not be upon us; there is a ground for God's controversy.

2. They determined to refer it to the lot which of them was the criminal that had occasioned this storm: *Let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us.* None of them suspected himself, or said, *Is it I, Lord; is it I?* But they suspected one another, and would find out the man. Note, It is a desirable thing, when any evil is upon us, to know for what cause it is upon us, that what is amiss may be amended, and, the grievance being redressed, the grief may be removed. In order to this we must look up to heaven, and pray, Lord, *show me wherefore thou contendest with me; that which I see not teach thou me.* These mariners desired to know the person that was the dead weight in their ship, the accursed thing, that that one man might *die for the people* and that the whole ship *might not be lost*; this was not only expedient, but highly just. In order to this they cast lots, by which they appealed to the judgment of God, to whom *all hearts are open, and from whom no secret is hid*, agreeing to acquiesce in his discovery and determination, and to take that for true which the lot spoke; for they knew by the light of nature, what the scripture tells us, that *the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.* Even the heathen looked upon the casting of lots to be a sacred thing, to be done with seriousness and solemnity, and not to be made a sport of. It is a shame for Christians if they have not a like reverence for an appeal to Providence.

3. The lot fell upon Jonah, who could have saved them this trouble if he would but have told them what his own conscience told him, *Thou art the man*; but as is usual with cri-

minals, he never confesses till he finds he cannot help it, till *the lot falls upon him.* We may suppose there were those in the ship who, upon other accounts, were greater sinners than Jonah, and yet he is the man that the tempest pursues and that the lot pitches upon; for it is his own child, his own servant, that the parent, that the master, corrects, if they do amiss; others that offend he leaves to the law. The storm is sent after Jonah, because God has work for him to do, and it is sent to fetch him back to it. Note, God has many ways of bringing to light concealed sins and sinners, and making manifest that folly which was thought to be hidden from the eyes of all living. God's right hand will find out all his servants that desert him, as well as all his enemies that have designs against him; yea, though they flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, or go down to the sides of the ship.

4. Jonah is hereupon brought under examination before the master and mariners. He was a stranger; none of them could say that they knew the prisoner, or had any thing to lay to his charge, and therefore they must extort a confession from him and judge him *out of his own mouth*; and for this there needed no rack, the shipwreck they were in danger of was sufficient to frighten him, so as to make him tell the truth. Though it was discovered by the lot that he was the person for whose sake they were thus damaged and exposed, yet they did not fly outrageously upon him, as one would fear they might have done, but calmly and mildly enquired into his case. There is a compassion due to offenders when they are discovered and convicted. They give him no hard words, but, "*Tell us, we pray thee, what is the matter?*" Two things they enquire of him:—(1.) Whether he would himself own that he was the person for whose sake the storm was sent, as the lot had intimated: "*Tell us for whose cause this evil is upon us*; is it indeed for thy cause, and, if so, *for what cause?*" What is the offence for which thou art thus prosecuted?" Perhaps the gravity and decency of Jonah's aspect and behaviour made them suspect that the lot had missed its man, had missed its mark, and therefore they would not trust it, unless he would himself own his guilt; they therefore begged of him that he would satisfy them in this matter. Note, Those that would find out the cause of their troubles must not only begin, but pursue the enquiry, must descend to particulars and *accomplish a diligent search.* (2.) What his character was, both as to his calling and as to his country. [1.] They enquire concerning his calling: *What is thy occupation?* This was a proper question to be put to a vagrant. Perhaps they suspected his calling to be such as might bring this trouble upon them: "*Art thou a diviner, a sorcerer, a student in the black art?* Hast thou been conjuring for this wind? Or what business



art thou now going on? Is it like Balaam's, to curse any of God's people, and is this wind sent to stop thee?" [2.] They enquire concerning his country. One asked, *Whence comest thou?* Another, not having patience to stay for an answer to that, asked, *What is thy country?* A third to the same purport, "*Of what people art thou?*" Art thou of the Chaldeans," that were noted for divination, "or of the Arabians," that were noted for stealing? They wished to know of what country he was, that, knowing who was the god of his country, they might guess whether he was one that could do them any kindness in this storm.

5. In answer to these interrogatories Jonah makes a full discovery. (1.) Did they enquire concerning his country? He tells them he is a *Hebrew* (v. 9), not only of the nation of Israel, but of their religion, which they received from their fathers. He is a Hebrew, and therefore is the more ashamed to own that he is a criminal; for the sins of Hebrews, that make such a profession of religion and enjoy such privileges, are greater than the sins of others, and more exceedingly sinful. (2.) Did they enquire concerning his calling—*What is thy occupation?* In answer to that he gives an account of his religion, for that was his calling, that was his occupation, that was it that he made a business of: "*I fear the Lord Jehovah*; that is the God I worship, the God I pray to, even *the God of heaven*, the sovereign Lord of all, that has *made the sea and the dry land* and has the command of both." Not the god of one particular country, which they enquired after, and such as the gods were that they had been every man calling upon, but *the God of the whole earth*, who, having made both the sea and the dry land, makes what work he pleases in both and makes what use he pleases of both. This he mentions, not only as condemning himself for his folly, in fleeing from the presence of this God, but as designing to bring these mariners from the worship and service of their many gods to the knowledge and obedience of the one only living and true God. When we are among those that are strangers to us we should do what we can to bring them acquainted with God, by being ready upon all occasions to own our relation to him and our reverence for him. (3.) Did they enquire concerning his crime, for which he is now prosecuted? He owns that he *fled from the presence of the Lord*, that he was here running away from his duty, and the storm was sent to fetch him back. We have reason to think that he told them this with sorrow and shame, justifying God and condemning himself and intimating to the mariners what a great God Jehovah is, who could send such a messenger as this tempest was after a runaway servant.

6. We are told what impression this made upon the mariners: *The men were exceedingly*

*afraid*, and justly, for they perceived, (1.) That God was angry, even that God that *made the sea and the dry land*. This tempest comes from the hand of an offended justice, and therefore they have reason to fear it will go hard with them. Judgments inflicted for some particular sin have a peculiar weight and terror in them. (2.) That God was angry with one that feared and worshipped him, only for once running from his work in a particular instance; this made them afraid for themselves. "If a prophet of the Lord be thus severely punished for one offence, what will become of us that have been guilty of so many, and great, and heinous offences?" *If the righteous be thus scarcely saved*, and for a single act of disobedience thus closely pursued, *where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18. They said to him, "*Why hast thou done this?*" If thou fearest the God that *made the sea and the dry land*, why wast thou such a fool as to think thou couldst flee from his presence? What an absurd unaccountable thing is it!" *Thus he was reprov'd*, as Abraham by Abimelech (Gen. xx. 16); for if the professors of religion do a wrong thing they must expect to hear of it from those that make no such profession. "*Why hast thou done this to us?*" (so it may be taken) "Why hast thou involved us in the prosecution?" Note, Those that commit a wilful sin know not how far the mischievous consequences of it may reach, nor what mischief may be done by it.

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. 12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. 14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. 15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. 17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the



belly of the fish three days and three nights.

It is plain that Jonah is the man for whose sake this evil is upon them, but the discovery of him to be so was not sufficient to answer the demands of this tempest; they had found him out, but something more was to be done, for still *the sea wrought and was tempestuous* (v. 11), and again (v. 13), it *grew more and more tempestuous* (so the margin reads it); for if we discover sin to be the cause of our troubles, and do not forsake it, we do but make bad worse. Therefore they went on with the prosecution.

I. They enquired of Jonah himself what he thought they must do with him (v. 11): *What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm to us?* They perceive that Jonah is a prophet of the Lord, and therefore will not do any thing, no, not in his own case, without consulting him. He appears to be a delinquent, but he appears also to be a penitent, and therefore they will not insult over him, nor offer him any rudeness. Note, We ought to act with great tenderness towards those that are overtaken in a fault and are brought into distress by it. They would not *cast him into the sea* if he could think of any other expedient by which to *save the ship*. Or, perhaps, thus they would show how plain the case was, that there was no remedy but he must be thrown overboard; let him be his own judge as he had been his own accuser, and he himself will say so. Note, When sin has raised a storm, and laid us under the tokens of God's displeasure, we are concerned to enquire what we shall do that the sea may be calm; and what shall we do? We must pray and believe, when we are in a storm, and study to answer the end for which it was sent, and then the storm shall become a calm. But especially we must consider what is to be done to the sin that raised the storm; that must be discovered, and penitently confessed; that must be detested, disclaimed, and utterly forsaken. What have I to do any more with it? Crucify it, crucify it, for this evil it has done.

II. Jonah reads his own doom (v. 12): *Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea.* He would not himself leap into the sea, but he put himself into their hands, to cast him into the sea, and assured them that then the *sea would be calm*, and not otherwise. He proposed this, in tenderness to the mariners, that they might not suffer for his sake. "*Let thy hand be upon me*" (says David, 1 Chron. xxi. 17), "who am guilty; let me die for my own sin, but let not the innocent suffer for it." This is the language of true penitents, who earnestly desire that none but themselves may ever smart, or fare the worse, for their sins and follies. He proposed it likewise in submission to the will of God, who sent this tempest in pursuit of him; and therefore judged himself to be cast into the

sea, because to that he plainly saw God judging him, that he might not be *judged of the Lord* to eternal misery. Note, Those who are truly humbled for sin will cheerfully submit to the will of God, even in a sentence of death itself. If Jonah sees this to be the punishment of his iniquity, he accepts it, he subjects himself to it, and justifies God in it. No matter though the *flesh be destroyed*, no matter how it is destroyed, so that the *spirit may but be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*, 1 Cor. v. 5. The reason he gives is, *For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.* See how ready Jonah is to take all the guilt upon himself, and to look upon all the trouble as theirs: "It is purely for my sake, who have sinned, that this tempest is upon you; therefore cast me forth into the sea; for," 1. "I deserve it. I have wickedly departed from my God, and it is upon my account that he is angry with you. Surely I am unworthy to breathe in that air which for my sake has been hurried with winds, to live in that ship which for my sake has been thus tossed. Cast me into the sea after the wares which for my sake you have thrown into it. Drowning is too good for me; a single death is punishment too little for such a complicated offence." 2. "Therefore there is no other way of having the sea calm. If it is I that have raised the storm, it is not casting the wares into the sea that will lay it again; no, you must cast me thither." When conscience is awakened, and a storm raised there, nothing will turn it into a calm but parting with the sin that occasioned the disturbance, and abandoning that. It is not parting with our money that will pacify conscience; no, it is the Jonah that must be thrown overboard. Jonah is herein a type of Christ, that he *gives his life a ransom for many*; but with this material difference, that the storm Jonah gave himself up to still was of his own raising, but that storm which Christ gave himself up to still was of our raising. Yet, as Jonah delivered himself up to be cast into a raging sea that it might be calm, so did our Lord Jesus, when he died that we might live.

III. The poor mariners did what they could to save themselves from the necessity of throwing Jonah into the sea, but all in vain (v. 13): *They rowed hard to bring the ship to the land*, that, if they must part with Jonah, they might set him safely on shore; *but they could not.* All their pains were to no purpose; *for the sea wrought harder than they could, and was tempestuous against them*, so that they could by no means *make the land*. If they thought sometimes that they had gained their point, they were quickly thrown off to sea again. Still their ship was overladen; their lightening it of the wares made it never the lighter as long as Jonah was in it. And, besides, they rowed against wind and tide, the wind of God's vengeance, the tide of his counsels; and it is in vain to con-



tend with God, in vain to think of saving ourselves any other way than by destroying our sins. By this it appears that these mariners were very loth to execute Jonah's sentence upon himself, though they knew it was for his sake that this tempest was upon them. They were thus very backward to it partly from a dread of bringing upon themselves the guilt of blood, and partly from a compassion they could not but have for poor Jonah, as a good man, as a man in distress, and as a man of sincerity. Note, The more sinners humble and abase themselves, judge and condemn themselves, the more likely they are to find pity both with God and man. The more forward Jonah was to say, *Cast me into the sea*, the more backward they were to do it.

IV. When they found it necessary to cast Jonah into the sea they first prayed to God that the guilt of his blood might not lie upon them, nor be laid to their charge, v. 14. When they found it in vain to row hard they quitted their oars and went to their prayers: *Wherefore they cried unto the Lord*, unto *Jehovah*, the true and living God, and no more to the *gods many*, and *lords many*, that they had *cried to*, v. 5. They prayed to the *God of Israel*, being now convinced, by the providences of God concerning Jonah and the information he had given them, that he is *God alone*. Having determined to cast Jonah into the sea, they first enter a protestation in the court of heaven that they do not do it willingly, much less maliciously, or with any design to be revenged upon him because it was for his sake that this tempest was upon them. No; *his God forgive him*, as *they do!* But they are forced to do it *se defendendo—in self-defence*, having no other way to save their own lives; and they do it as ministers of justice, both God and himself having sentenced him to *so great a death*. They *therefore* present a humble petition to the God whom Jonah feared, that they might not *perish for his life*. See, 1. What a fear they had of contracting the guilt of blood, especially the blood of one that feared God, and worshipped him, and had fellowship with him, as they perceived Jonah had, though in a single instance he had been faulty. Natural conscience cannot but have a dread of blood-guiltiness, and make men very earnest in prayer, as David was, to be delivered from it, Ps. li. 14. So they were here: *We beseech thee, O Lord! we beseech thee, lay not upon us innocent blood*. They are now as earnest in praying to be saved from the peril of the sin as they were before in praying to be saved from the peril of the sea, especially because Jonah appeared to them to be no ordinary person, but a very good man, a man of God, a worshipper of the great Creator of heaven and earth, upon which account even these rude mariners conceived a veneration for him, and trembled at the thought of taking away his life. Inno-

cent blood is precious, but saints' blood, prophets' blood, is much more precious, and so those will find to their cost that any way bring themselves under the guilt of it. The mariners saw Jonah pursued by divine vengeance, and yet could not without horror think of being his executioners. Though his God has a controversy with him, yet, think they, *Let not our hand be upon him*. The Israelites were at this time killing the prophets for doing their duty (witness Jezebel's late persecution), and were prodigal of their lives, which is aggravated by the tenderness these heathens had for one whom they perceived to be a prophet, though he was now out of the way of his duty. 2. What a fear they had of incurring the wrath of God; they were jealous lest he should be angry if they should be the death of Jonah, for he had said, *Touch not my anointed, and do my prophets no harm*; it is at your peril if you do. "Lord," say they, *let us not perish for this man's life*. Let it not be such a fatal dilemma to us. We see we must perish if we spare his life; Oh let us not perish for taking away his life." And their plea is good: *For thou, O Lord! hast done as it pleased thee*; thou hast laid us under a necessity of doing it; the wind that pursued him, the lot that discovered him, were both under thy direction, which we are herein governed by; we are but the instruments of Providence, and it is sorely against our will that we do it; but we must say, *The will of the Lord be done*." Note, When we are manifestly led by Providence to do things contrary to our own inclinations, and quite beyond our own intentions, it will be some satisfaction to us to be able to say, *Thou, O Lord! hast done as it pleased thee*. And, if God please himself, we ought to be satisfied though he do not please us.

V. Having deprecated the guilt they dreaded, they proceeded to execution (v. 15): *They took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea*. They cast him out of their ship, out of their company, and cast him into the sea, a raging stormy sea, that cried, "Give, give; surrender the traitor, or expect no peace." We may well think what confusion and amazement poor Jonah was in when he saw himself ready to be hurried into the presence of that God as a Judge whose presence as a Master he was now fleeing from. Note, Those know not what ruin they run upon that run away from God. *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me*. When sin is the Jonah that raises the storm, that must thus be cast forth into the sea; we must abandon it, and be the death of it, must drown that which otherwise will *drown us in destruction and perdition*. And if we thus by a thorough repentance and reformation cast our sins forth into the sea, never to recal them or return to them again, God will by pardoning mercy subdue our iniquities, and *cast them into the depths of the sea too*, Mic. vii. 19.



VI. The throwing of Jonah into the sea immediately put an end to the storm. The sea has what she came for, and therefore rests contented; she *ceases from her raging*. It is an instance of the sovereign power of God that he can soon turn the storm into a calm, and of the equity of his government that when the end of an affliction is answered and attained the affliction shall immediately be removed. He will not contend for ever, will not contend any longer than till we submit ourselves and give up the cause. If we turn from our sins, he will soon turn from his anger.

VII. The mariners were hereby more confirmed in their belief that Jonah's God was the only true God (v. 16): *Then the men feared the Lord with a great fear*, were possessed with a deep veneration for the God of Israel, and came to a resolution that they would worship him only for the future; for *there is no other God that can destroy, that can deliver, after this sort*. When they saw the power of God in raising and laying the tempest, when they saw his justice upon Jonah his own servant, and when they saw his goodness to them in saving them from the brink of ruin, *then they feared the Lord*, Jer. v. 22. As an evidence of their fear of him, they *offered sacrifice* to him when they came ashore again in the land of Israel, and for the present made vows that they would do so, in thankfulness for their deliverance, and to make atonement for their souls. Or, perhaps, they had something yet on board which might be for a sacrifice to God immediately. Or it may be meant of the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, with which God is better pleased than with that of an ox or bullock that has horns and hoofs. See Ps. cvii. 22, &c. We must make vows, not only when we are in the pursuit of mercy, but, which is much more generous, when we have received mercy, as those that are still studying what we shall render.

VIII. Jonah's life, after all, is saved by a miracle, and we shall hear of him again for all this. In the midst of judgment God *remembers mercy*. Jonah shall be worse frightened than hurt, not so much punished for his sin as reduced to his duty. Though he flees from the presence of the Lord, and seems to fall into his avenging hands, yet God has more work for him to do, and therefore has *prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah* (v. 17), a whale our Saviour calls it (Matt. xii. 40), one of the largest sorts of whales, that have wider throats than others, in the belly of which has sometimes been found the dead body of a man in armour. Particular notice is taken, in the history of the creation, of God's *creating great whales* (Gen. i. 21) and the *leviathan* in the waters *made to play therein*, Ps. civ. 26. But God finds work for this leviathan, has *prepared him*, has *numbered him* (so the word is), has appointed him to be Jonah's receiver and

deliverer. Note, God has command of all the creatures, and can make any of them serve his designs of mercy to his people, even the fishes of the sea, that are most from under man's cognizance, even the great whales, that are altogether from under man's government. This fish was prepared, lay ready under water close by the ship, that he might keep Jonah from sinking to the bottom, and save him alive, though he deserved to die. Let us *stand still and see this salvation of the Lord*, and admire his power, that he could thus save a drowning man, and his pity, that he would thus save one that was running from him and had offended him. It was of the Lord's mercies that Jonah was not now consumed. The fish swallowed up Jonah, not to devour him, but to protect him. *Out of the eater comes forth meat*; for Jonah was alive and well *in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*, not consumed by the heat of the animal, nor suffocated for want of air. It is granted that to nature this was impossible, but not to the God of nature, with whom all things are possible. Jonah by this miraculous preservation was designed to be made, 1. A monument of divine mercy, for the encouragement of those that have sinned, and gone away from God, to return and repent. 2. A successful preacher to Nineveh; and this miracle wrought for his deliverance, if the tidings of it reached Nineveh, would contribute to his success. 3. An illustrious type of Christ, who was buried and rose again according to the scriptures (1 Cor. xv. 4), according to this scripture, for, *as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so was the Son of man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, Matt. xii. 40. Jonah's burial was a figure of Christ's. God prepared Jonah's grave, so he did Christ's, when it was long before ordained that he should *make his grave with the rich*, Isa. liii. 9. Was Jonah's grave a strange one, a new one? So was Christ's, one in which never man before was laid. Was Jonah there the best part of three days and three nights? So was Christ; but both in order to their rising again for the bringing of the doctrine of repentance to the Gentile world. *Come, see the place where the Lord lay*.

#### CHAP. II.

We left Jonah in the belly of the fish, and had reason to think we should hear no more of him, that if he were not destroyed by the waters of the sea he would be consumed in the bowels of that leviathan, "out of whose mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire, and whose breath kindles coals," Job xli. 19, 21. But God brings his people through fire, and through water (Ps. lxxv. 19); and by his power, behold, Jonah the prophet is yet alive, and is heard of again. In this chapter God hears from him, for we find him praying; in the next Nineveh hears from him, for we find him preaching. In his prayer we have, I. The great distress and danger he was in, ver. 2, 3, 5, 6. II. The despair he was thereby almost reduced to, ver. 4. III. The encouragement he took to himself, in this deplorable condition, ver. 4, 7. IV. The assurance he had of God's favour to him, ver. 6, 7. V. The warning and instruction he gives to others, ver. 8. VI. The praise and glory of all given to God, ver. 9. In the last verse we have Jonah's deliverance out of the belly of the fish, and his coming safe and sound upon dry land again.

**T**HEN Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's



belly, 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. 5 The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

God and his servant Jonah had parted in anger, and the quarrel began on Jonah's side; he fled from his country that he might outrun his work; but we hope to see them both together again, and the reconciliation begins on God's side. In the close of the foregoing chapter we found God returning to Jonah in a way of mercy, *delivering him from going down to the pit*, having found a ransom; in this chapter we find Jonah returning to God in a way of duty; he was called up in the former chapter to pray to his God, but we are not told that he did so; however, now at length he is brought to it. Now observe here,

I. When he prayed (v. 1): *Then Jonah prayed*; then when he was in trouble, under the sense of sin and the tokens of God's displeasure against him for sin, then he prayed. Note, When we are in affliction we must pray; then we have occasion to pray, then we have errands at the throne of grace and business there; then, if ever, we shall have a disposition to pray, when the heart is humbled, and softened, and made serious; then God expects it (*in their affliction they will seek me early*, seek me earnestly); and, though we bring our afflictions upon ourselves by our sins, yet, if we pray in humility and godly sincerity, we shall be welcome to the throne of grace, as Jonah was. Then when he was in a hopeful way of deliverance, being preserved alive by miracle, a plain indication that he was reserved for further

mercy, then he prayed. An apprehension of God's good-will to us, notwithstanding our offences, gives us boldness of access to him, and opens the lips in prayer which were closed with the sense of guilt and dread of wrath.

II. Where he prayed—in *the fish's belly*. No place is amiss for prayer. *I will that men pray every where*. Wherever God casts us we may find a way open heaven-ward, if it be not our own fault. *Undique ad cælos tantundem est via—The heavens are equally accessible from every part of the earth*. He that has Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, wherever he goes carries his altar along with him, that sanctifies the gift, and is himself a living temple. Jonah was here in confinement; the belly of the fish was his prison, was a close and dark dungeon to him; yet there he had freedom of access to God, and walked at liberty in communion with him. Men may shut us out from communion with one another, but not from communion with God. Jonah was now in the bottom of the sea, yet *out of the depths he cries to God*; as Paul and Silas prayed in the prison, in the stocks.

III. To whom he prayed—to *the Lord his God*. He had been fleeing from God, but now he sees the folly of it, and returns to him; by prayer he draws near to that God whom he had gone aside from, and *engages his heart to approach him*. In prayer he has an eye to him, not only as *the Lord*, but as *his God*, a God in covenant with him; for, thanks be to God, every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant. This encourages even backsliding children to return. Jer. iii. 22, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God*.

IV. What his prayer was. He afterwards recollected the substance of it, and left it upon record. He reflects upon the workings of his heart towards God when he was in his distress and danger, and the conflict that was then in his breast between faith and sense, between hope and fear.

1. He reflects upon the earnestness of his prayer, and God's readiness to hear and answer (v. 2): He said, *I cried, by reason of my affliction, unto the Lord*. Note, Many that prayed not at all, or did but whisper prayer, when they were in prosperity, are brought to pray, nay, are brought to cry, *by reason of their affliction*; and it is for this end that afflictions are sent, and they are in vain if this end be not answered. Those heap up wrath who cry not when God binds them, Job xxxvi. 13. "*Out of the belly of hell and the grave cried I.*" The fish might well be called a grave, and, as it was a prison to which Jonah was condemned for his disobedience and in which he lay under the wrath of God, it might well be called the belly of hell. Thither this good man was cast, and yet thence he cried to God, and it was not in vain; God *heard him, heard his*



voice of his affliction, the voice of his supplication. There is a hell in the other world, out of which there is no crying to God with any hope of being heard; but, whatever hell we may be in the belly of in this world, we may thence cry to God. When Christ lay, as Jonah, three days and three nights in the grave, though he prayed not, as Jonah did, yet his very lying there cried to God for poor sinners, and the cry was heard.

2. He reflects upon the very deplorable condition that he was in when he was in the belly of hell, which, when he lay there, he was very sensible of and made particular remarks upon. Note, If we would get good by our troubles, we must take notice of our troubles, and of the hand of God in them. Jonah observes here, (1.) How low he was thrown (v. 3): *Thou hadst cast me into the deep*. The mariners cast him there; but he looked above them, and saw the hand of God casting him there. Whatever deeps we are cast into, it is God that casts us into them, and he it is who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*. He was cast into the midst of the seas—the heart of the seas (so the word is), and thence Christ borrows that Hebrew phrase, when he applies it to his own lying so long in the heart of the earth. For he that is laid dead in the grave, though it be ever so shallow, is cut off as effectually from the land of the living as if he were laid in the heart of the earth. (2.) How terribly he was beset: *The floods compassed me about*. The channels and springs of the waters of the sea surrounded him on every side; it was always high-water with him. God's dear saints and servants are sometimes encompassed with the floods of affliction, with troubles that are very forcible and violent, that bear down all before them, and that run constantly upon them, as the waters of a river in a continual succession, one trouble upon the neck of another, as Job's messengers of evil tidings; they are enclosed by them on all sides, as the church complains, Lam. iii. 7. *He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out*, nor see which way I may flee for safety. *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me*. Observe, He calls them God's billows and his waves, not only because he made them (*the sea is his, and he made it*), and because he rules them (*for even the winds and the seas obey him*), but because he had now commissioned them against Jonah, and limited them, and ordered them to afflict and terrify him, but not to destroy him. These words are plainly quoted by Jonah from Ps. xlii. 7, where, though the translations differ a little, in the original David's complaint is the same *verbatim—word for word*, with this of Jonah's: *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me*. What David spoke figuratively and metaphorically Jonah applies to himself as literally fulfilled. For the reconciling of ourselves to our afflictions, it is good to search precedents, that we may

find *there has no temptation taken us but such as is common to men*. If ever any man's case was singular, and not to be paralleled, surely Jonah's was, and yet, to his great satisfaction, he finds even the man after God's own heart making the same complaint of God's *waves and billows going over him* that he has now occasion to make. When God performs the thing that is appointed for us we shall find that many such things are with him, that even our path of trouble is no untrodden path, and that God deals with us no otherwise than as he uses to deal with those that love his name. And therefore for our assistance in our addresses to God, when we are in trouble, it is good to make use of the complaints and prayers which the saints that have been before us made use of in the like case. See how good it is to be ready in the scriptures; Jonah, when he could make no use of his Bible, by the help of his memory furnished himself from the scripture with a very proper representation of his case: *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me*. To the same purport, v. 5, *The waters compassed me about even to the soul*; they threatened his life, which was hereby brought into imminent danger; or they made an impression upon his spirit; he saw them to be tokens of God's displeasure, and in them the terrors of the Almighty set themselves in array against him; this reached to his soul, and put that into confusion. And this also is borrowed from David's complaint, Ps. lxi. 1, *The waters have come in unto my soul*. When without are fightings it is no marvel that within are fears. Jonah, in the fish's belly, finds the depths enclosing him round about, so that if he would get out of his prison, yet he must unavoidably perish in the waters. He feels the sea-weed (which the fish sucked in with the water) wrapped about his head, so that he has no way left him to help himself, nor hope that any one else can help him. Thus are the people of God sometimes perplexed and entangled, that they may learn not to trust in themselves, but in God that raises the dead, 2 Cor. i. 8, 9. (3.) How fast he was held (v. 6): *He went down to the bottom of the mountains, to the rocks in the sea, upon which the hills and promontories by the sea-side seem to be bottomed; he lay among them, nay, he lay under them; the earth with her bars was about him*, so close about him that it was likely to be about him for ever. The earth was so shut and locked, so barred and bolted, against him, that he was quite cut off from any hope of ever returning to it. Thus helpless, thus hopeless, did Jonah's case seem to be. Those whom God contends with the whole creation is at war with.

3. He reflects upon the very black and melancholy conclusion he was then ready to make concerning himself, and the relief he obtained against it, v. 4, 7. (1.) He began to sink into despair, and to give up himself for gone and undone to all intents and

purposes. When the waters compassed him about even to the soul no marvel that his soul fainted within him, fainted away, so that he had not any comfortable enjoyments or expectations; his spirits quite failed, and he looked upon himself as a dead man. *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight*, and the apprehension of that was the thing that made his spirit faint within him. He thought God had quite forsaken him, would never return in mercy to him, nor show him any token for good again. He had no example before him of any that were brought alive out of a fish's belly; if he thought of Job upon the dunghill, Joseph in the pit, David in the cave, yet these did not come up to his case. Nor was there any visible way of escape open for him but by miracle; and what reason had he to expect that a miracle of mercy should be wrought for him who was now made a monument of justice? His own conscience told him that he had wickedly fled from the presence of the Lord, and therefore he might justly cast him away from his presence, and, in token of that, take away his Holy Spirit from him, never to visit him more. What hopes could he have of deliverance out of a trouble which his own ways and doings had procured to himself? Observe, When Jonah would say the worst he could of his case he says this, *I am cast out of thy sight*; those, and those only, are miserable, whom God has cast out of his sight, whom he will no longer own and favour. What is the misery of the damned in hell but this, that they are cast out of God's sight? For what is the happiness of heaven but the vision and fruition of God? Sometimes the condition of God's people may be such in this world that they may think themselves quite excluded from God's presence, so as no more to see him, or to be regarded by him. Jacob and Israel said, *My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God*, Isa. xl. 27. *Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me, my God has forgotten me*, Isa. xlix. 14. But it is only the surmise of unbelief, for God has not cast away his people whom he has chosen. (2.) Yet he recovered himself from sinking into despair, with some comfortable prospects of deliverance. Faith corrected and controlled the surmises of fear and distrust. Here was a fierce struggle between sense and faith, but faith had the last word and came off a conqueror. In trying times, the issue will be good at last, provided our faith do not fail; it was therefore the continuance of that in its vigour that Christ secured to Peter. *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*, Luke xxii. 32. David would have fainted if he had not believed, Ps. xxvii. 13. Jonah's faith said, *Yet I will look again towards thy holy temple*. Thus, though he was perplexed, yet not in despair; in the depth of the sea he had this hope in him, as an anchor of the

soul, sure and steadfast. That which he supports himself with the hope of is that he shall yet look again towards God's holy temple. [1.] That he shall live; he shall look again heaven-ward, shall again see the light of the sun, though now he seems to be cast into utter darkness. Thus against hope he believed in hope. [2.] That he shall live, and praise God; and a good man does not desire to live for any other purpose, Ps. cxix. 175. That he shall enjoy communion with God again in holy ordinances, shall look towards, and go up to, the holy temple, there to enquire, there to behold the beauty of the Lord. When Hezekiah desired that he might be assured of his recovery, he asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?* (Isa. xxxviii. 22), as if that were the only thing for the sake of which he wished for health; so Jonah here hopes he shall look again towards the temple; that way he had looked many a time with pleasure, rejoicing when he was called to go up to the house of the Lord; and the remembrance of it was his comfort, that, when he had opportunity, he was no stranger to the holy temple. But now he could not so much as look towards it; in the fish's belly he could not tell which way it lay, but he hopes he shall be again able to look towards it, to look on it, to look into it. Observe, How modestly Jonah expresses himself; as one conscious to himself of guilt and unworthiness, he dares not speak of dwelling in God's house, as David, knowing that he is no more worthy to be called a son, but he hopes he may be admitted to look towards it. He calls it the holy temple, for the holiness of it was, in his eye, the beauty of it, and that for the sake of which he loved and looked towards it. The temple was a type of heaven; and he promises himself that though being now a captive exile, he should never be loosed, but die in the pit, yet he should look towards the heavenly temple, and be brought safely thither. Though he die in the fish's belly, in the bottom of the sea, yet thence he hopes his soul shall be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Or these words may be taken as Jonah's vow when he was in distress, and he speaks (v. 9) of paying what he vowed; his vow is that if God deliver him he will praise him in the gates of the daughter of Zion, Ps. ix. 13, 14. His sin for which God pursued him was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, the folly of which he is now convinced of, and promises not only that he will never again look towards Tarshish, but that he will again look towards the temple, and will go from strength to strength till he appear before God there. And thus we see how faith and hope were his relief in his desponding condition. To these he added prayer to God (v. 7): "When my soul fainted within me, then I remembered the Lord, I betook myself to that cordial." He remembered what he is, how



nigh to those that seem to be thrown at the greatest distance by trouble, how merciful to those that seem to have thrown themselves at a distance from him by sin. He remembered what he had done for him, what he had done for others, what he could do, what he had promised to do; and this kept him from fainting. Remembering God, he made his addresses to him: "*My prayer came in unto thee; I sent it in, and expected to receive an answer to it.*" Note, Our afflictions should put us in mind of God, and thereby put us upon prayer to him. When our souls faint we must remember God; and, when we remember God, we must send up a prayer to him, a pious ejaculation at least; when we think on his name we should call on his name.

4. He reflects upon the favour of God to him when thus in his distress he sought to God and trusted in him. (1.) He graciously accepted his prayer, and gave admission and audience to it (v. 7): *My prayer*, being sent to him, *came in unto him, even into his holy temple*; it was heard in the highest heavens, though it was prayed in the lowest deeps. (2.) He wonderfully wrought deliverance for him, and, when he was in the depth of his misery, gave him the earnest and assurance of it (v. 6): *Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God!* Some think he said this when he was vomited up on dry ground; and then it is the language of his thankfulness, and he sets it over-against the great difficulty of his case, that the power of God might be the more magnified in his deliverance: *The earth with her bars was about me for ever, and yet thou hast brought up my life from the pit, from the bars of the pit.* Or, rather, we may suppose it spoken while he was yet in the fish's belly, and then it is the language of his faith: "Thou hast kept me alive here, in the pit, and therefore thou canst, thou wilt, *bring up my life from the pit*;" and he speaks of it with as much assurance as if it were done already: *Thou hast brought up my life.* Though he has not an express promise of deliverance, he has an earnest of it, and on that he depends; he has life, and therefore believes his life shall be *brought up from corruption*; and this assurance he addresses to God: *Thou hast done it, O Lord my God!* Thou art the Lord, and therefore *canst* do it for me, my God, and therefore wilt do it. Note, If the Lord be our God, he will be to us the *resurrection and the life*, will redeem our lives from destruction, from the power of the grave.

5. He gives warning to others, and instructs them to keep close to God (v. 8): *Those that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy*, that is, (1.) Those that worship other gods, as the heathen mariners did, and call upon them, and expect relief and comfort from them, *forsake their own mercy*; they stand in their own light; they turn their

back upon their own happiness, and go quite out of the way of all good. Note, Idols are *lying vanities*, and those that pay that homage to them which is due to God only act as contrarily to their interests as to their duty. Or, (2.) Those that follow their own inventions, as Jonah himself had done when he *fled from the presence of the Lord* to go to Tarshish, *forsake their own mercy*, that mercy which they might find in God, and might have such a covenant-right and title to it as to be able to call it their own, if they would but keep close to God and their duty. Those that think to go any where to be from under the eye of God, as Jonah did—that think to better themselves by deserting his service, as Jonah did—and that grudge his mercy to any poor sinners, and pretend to be wiser than he in judging who are fit to have prophets sent them and who not, as Jonah did—they *observe lying vanities*, are led away by foolish groundless fancies, and, like him, they *forsake their own mercy*, and no good can come of it. Note, Those that forsake their own duty forsake their own mercy; those that run away from the work of their place and day run away from the comfort of it.

6. He solemnly binds his soul with a bond that, if God work deliverance for him, the God of his mercies shall be the God of his praises, v. 9. He covenants with God, (1.) That he will honour him in his devotions with the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*; and God has said, for the encouragement of those that do so, that those that *offer praise glorify him*. He will, according to the law of Moses, bring a *sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and will offer that according to the law of nature, with the *voice of thanksgiving*. The love and thankfulness of the heart to God are the life and soul of this duty; without these neither the sacrifice of thanksgiving nor the voice of thanksgiving will avail any thing. But gratitude was then, by a divine appointment, to be expressed by a sacrifice, in which the offerer presented the beast slain to God, not in lieu of himself, but in token of himself; and it is now to be expressed by the *voice of thanksgiving*, the *calves of our lips* (Hos. xiv. 2), the *fruit of our lips* (Heb. xiii. 15), speaking forth, singing forth, the high praises of our God. This Jonah here promises, that with the sacrifice of thanksgiving he will *mention the lovingkindness of the Lord*, to his glory, and the encouragement of others. (2.) That he will honour him in his conversation by a punctual performance of his vows, which he made in the fish's belly. Some think it was some work of charity that he vowed, or such a vow as Jacob's was, *Of all that thou hast given me I will give the tenth unto thee*. More probably his vow was that if God would deliver him he would readily go wherever he should please to send him, though it were to Nineveh. When we smart for deserting our duty it is time to promise that we will adhere to it, and abound in it. Or, perhaps,



the sacrifice of thanksgiving is the thing he vowed, and that is it which he will pay, as David, Ps. cxvi. 17—19.

7. He concludes with an acknowledgment of God as the Saviour of his people: *Salvation is of the Lord; it belongs to the Lord*, Ps. iii. 8. He is the *God of salvation*, Ps. lxviii. 19, 20. He only can work salvation, and he can do it be the danger and distress ever so great; he has promised salvation to his people that trust in him. All the salvations of his church in general, and of particular saints, were wrought by him; he is the *Saviour of those that believe*, 1 Tim. iv. 10. Salvation is still of him, as it has always been; from him alone it is to be expected, and on him we are to depend for it. Jonah's experience shall encourage others, in all ages, to trust in God as the God of their salvation; all that read this story shall say with assurance, say with admiration, that *salvation is of the Lord*, and is sure to all that belongs to him.

10 And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

We have here Jonah's discharge from his imprisonment, and his deliverance from that death which there he was threatened with—his return, though not to life, for he lived in the fish's belly, yet to the *land of the living*, for from that he seemed to be quite cut off—his resurrection, though not from death, yet from the grave, for surely never man was so buried alive as Jonah was in the fish's belly. His enlargement may be considered, 1. As an instance of God's power over all the creatures. *God spoke to the fish*, gave him orders to return him, as before he had given him orders to receive him. God speaks to other creatures, and *it is done*; they are all his ready obedient servants. But to man he *speaks once, yea, twice, and he perceives it not*, regards it not, but turns a deaf ear to what he says. Note, God has all creatures at his command, makes what use he pleases of them, and serves his own purposes by them. 2. As an instance of God's mercy to a poor penitent, that in his distress prays to him. Jonah had sinned, had done foolishly, very foolishly; his own backslidings did not correct him, and it appears by his after-conduct that his foolishness was not quite driven from him, no, not by the rod of this correction; and yet, upon his praying, and humbling himself before God, here is a miracle in nature wrought for his deliverance, to intimate what a miracle of grace, free grace, God's reception and entertainment of returning sinners are. When God had him at his mercy he showed him mercy, and did not contend for ever. 3. As a type and figure of Christ's resurrection. He died and was buried, to lay the storm which our sin had raised, and lay in the grave, as Jonah did, three days and three nights, a prisoner for

our debt; but the third day he came forth, as Jonah did, by his messengers to preach repentance, and remission of sins, even to the Gentiles. And thus was another scripture fulfilled, *After two days he will receive us, and the third day he will raise us up*, Hos. vi. 2. The earth trembled as if full of her burden, as the fish was of Jonah.

## CHAP. III.

In this chapter we have, 1. Jonah's mission renewed, and the command a second time given him to go preach at Nineveh, ver. 1, 2. 11. Jonah's message to Nineveh faithfully delivered, by which its speedy overthrow was threatened, ver. 3, 4. 111. The repentance, humiliation, and reformation of the Ninevites hereupon, ver. 5—9. IV. God's gracious revocation of the sentence passed upon them, and the preventing of the ruin threatened, ver. 10.

AND the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

We have here a further evidence of the reconciliation between God and Jonah, and that it was a thorough reconciliation, though the controversy between them had run high.

I. Jonah's commission is renewed and readily obeyed.

1. By this it appears that God was perfectly reconciled to Jonah, that he employed him again in his service; and the commission anew given him was an evidence of the remission of his former disobedience. Among men, it has been justly pleaded that the giving of a commission to a criminal convicted is equivalent to a pardon, so it was to Jonah. *The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time* (v. 1); for, 1. Jonah must be tried, whether he do indeed repent of his former disobedience or no, and whether he have gotten the good designed him both by his strange punishment and by his strange deliverance. He had deserted his work and duty, and had been under an arrest for it, had received a *sentence of death within himself*; but, upon his submission, God had released him, had given him his life, had given him his liberty; but it is upon his good behaviour that he is released, and he must again be put upon the trial whether he will follow the will of God or his own will. After he has been thrown into the sea, and thrown out of it again, God comes and asks him, "Jonah, wilt thou go to Nineveh now?" For *when God judges he will overcome*, he will gain his point; he will bring the disobedient stubborn child to his foot at last. Note, When God has afflicted us, and delivered us out of affliction, we must hear



his voice, saying to us, Now return to the duties which before you neglected, and which by these providences you are called to. God now said, in effect, to Jonah, as Christ said to the impotent man, when he had healed him, "Now go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee (John v. 14), a worse thing than lying three days and three nights in the whale's belly." God looks upon men, when he has afflicted them and has delivered them out of their affliction, to see whether they will mend of that fault, particularly, for which they were corrected; and therefore in that thing we are concerned to see to it that we receive not the grace of God in vain, neither in the correction nor in the deliverance, for both are designed to be means of grace. (2.) Jonah shall be trusted, in token of God's favour to him. God might justly have said concerning Jonah, as we should concerning one that had cheated us and dealt treacherously with us, that though we would not proceed to the rigour of the law against him, nor ruin him, yet we would never again repose a confidence in him; justly might the Spirit of prophecy, which Jonah had resisted and rebelled against, depart from him, with a resolution never to return to him any more. One would have expected that though his life was spared, yet he would be laid under a disability and incapacity ever to serve the government again in the character of a prophet. But, behold! the word of the Lord comes to him again, to show that when God forgives he forgets, and whom he forgives he gives a new heart and a new spirit to; he receives those into his family again, and restores them to their former estate, that had been prodigal children and disobedient servants. Note, God's making use of us is the best evidence of his being at peace with us. Hereby it will appear that our sins are pardoned, and we have the good-will of God towards us; does his good word come unto us, and do we experience his good work in us! if so, we have reason to admire the riches of free grace and to own our obligations to the Lord Jesus, who received gifts for men, *yea, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell even among them, and employ them in his word*, Ps. lxxviii. 18.

2. By this it appears that Jonah was well reconciled to God, that he was not now, as he had been before, *disobedient to the heavenly vision*, did not flee from the presence of the Lord, as he had done. He neither endeavoured to avoid hearing the command, nor did he decline obeying it; he made no objections, as he had done, that the journey was long, the errand invidious, the delivery of it perilous, and, if the threatened judgment did not come, he should be reproached as a false prophet, and the impenitence of his own nation would be upbraided, which he had objected, *ch. iv. 2*. But now, without murmuring and disputing, *Jonah arose,*

*and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord*, v. 3. See here, (1.) The nature of repentance; it is the change of our mind and way, and a return to our work and duty, from which we had turned aside; it is doing that good which we had left undone. (2.) The benefit of affliction; it reduces those to their place that had deserted it. Jonah might truly say with David, "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word*"; and therefore, though it was dreadful, though it was painful to me, and for the present not joyous, but grievous, yet it was good, very good, for me, that I was afflicted." (3.) See the power of divine grace working with affliction, for otherwise affliction of itself would rather drive men from God than bring them to him; but God by his grace can turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and make those willing in the day of his power, freely willing to come under his yoke, whose neck had been as an iron sinew. (4.) See the duty of all those to whom the word of the Lord comes; they must in all points conform themselves to it, and yield a cheerful faithful obedience to the orders God gives them. *Jonah arose*, and did not sit still in sloth or sullenness; he went directly to Nineveh, though it was a great way off, and a place where, it is likely, he never was before; yet thither he took his journey, according to the word of the Lord. God's servants must go where he sends them, come when he calls them, and do what he bids them; whatever appears to be the word of the Lord we must conscientiously do according to it.

II. Let us now see what was the command or commission given him, and what he did in prosecution of it.

1. He was sent as a herald at arms, in the name of the God of heaven, to proclaim war with Nineveh (v. 2): "*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city,*" that metropolis, and *preach unto it, preach against it*, so the Chaldee. What is against us is preached to us, that we may hear it and take warning; and what is preached to us, if we do not give ear to it, and mix faith with it, will prove to be against us. Jonah is sent to Nineveh, which was at this time the chief city of the Gentile world, as an indication of God's gracious intentions in process of time to make the light of divine revelation to shine in those dark regions. God knew that if Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, had had the means of grace, they would have repented, and yet he denied them those means, Matt. xi. 21, 23. He knew that if Nineveh had now the means of grace they would repent, and he gave them those means, sent Jonah, though not to preach repentance to them expressly (for we find not that he had that in his commission), yet to preach them to repentance, for that was the happy effect of what he had in commission. If God thus in dispensing his favours, in giving the means of

grace to some places and not to others, and the spirit of grace to some persons and not to others, acts by prerogative and in a way of sovereignty, who may say unto him, What doest thou? *May he not do what he will with his own?* He is debtor to no man. Go, and preach (says God) *the preaching that I bid thee*. That is, (1.) "The preaching that I did bid thee when I first ordered thee to go thither (*ch. i. 2*); go, and cry against it; denounce divine judgments against it; tell the men of Nineveh that their wickedness has come up to God, and God's vengeance is coming down upon them." This was the message Jonah was then very loth to deliver, and therefore flew off and went to Tarshish; but, when he is brought to it the second time, God does not at all alter the message, to gratify him, or make it the more passable with him; no, he must now preach the very same that he was then ordered to preach and would not. Note, The word of God is an unalterable thing, and will not be made to bend to the humours either of its preachers or of its hearers; it shall never comply with their humours and fancies, but they must comply with its truths and laws. See Jer. xv. 19. *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*. Or, (2.) "The preaching that I shall bid thee when thou comest thither." This was an encouragement to him in his undertaking, that God would go along with him, that the Spirit of prophecy should abide upon him, and be ready to him, when he was at Nineveh, to give him all the further instructions that were needful for him. This intimated that he should hear from him again, which would be his great support in this hazardous expedition; as, when God sent Abraham to offer up Isaac, he gave him a similar intimation, by telling him he must do it upon *one of the mountains which he would afterwards direct him to*. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord*; he leads his people step by step, and so he expects they should follow him. Jonah must go with an implicit faith. Though he knows whither he goes, he shall not know, till he come thither, what message he must deliver, but, whatever it is, he must deliver it, be it pleasing or displeasing. Thus God will keep us in a continual dependence upon himself, and the directions of his word and providence. What he does, and what he will have us to do, we *know not now*, but we *shall know hereafter*. Admirals, sometimes, when they are sent abroad, are not to open their commission till they have got so many leagues off at sea; so Jonah must go to Nineveh, and, when he comes there, shall be told what to say.

III. He faithfully and boldly delivered his errand. When he came to Nineveh he found his diocese large; it was an *exceedingly great city of three days' journey* (v. 3); a city great to God, so the Hebrew phrase is, meaning no more than as we render it, *exceedingly*

*great*; this honour that language does to the great God that great things derive their denomination from him. The greatness of Nineveh consisted chiefly in the extent of it; it was much larger than Babylon, such a city, says Diodorus Siculus, as no man ever after built. It was 150 furlongs long and 90 broad, and 480 in compass; the walls 100 feet high, and so thick that three chariots might go a-breast upon them; on them were 1500 towers, each of them 200 feet high. It is here said to be *of three days' journey*; for the compass of the walls, as some relate, was 480 furlongs, which, allowing eight furlongs to a mile, makes sixty miles, which may well be reckoned *three days' journey* for a footman, twenty miles a day. Or, walking slowly and gravely as Jonah must when he went about preaching, it would take him up at least *three days* to go through all the principal streets and lanes of the city, to proclaim his message, that all might have notice of it. When he came thither he lost no time; he did not come to look about him, but applied closely to his work; and, when he began to enter into the city, he did not retire into an inn, to refresh himself after his journey, but opened his commission immediately, according to his instructions, and he *cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*. This, no doubt, he had particular warrant and direction to say; whether he enlarged upon this text, as is most probable, showing them the controversy God had with them, and how provoking their wickedness was, and what reason they had to expect destruction and to give credit to this warning, or whether he only repeated those words again and again, is not certain, but this was the purport of his message. 1. He must tell them that this great city shall be overthrown; he meant, and they understood him, that it should be overthrown, not by war, but by some immediate stroke from heaven, either by an earthquake or by fire and brimstone as Sodom was. The wickedness of cities ripens them for destruction, and their wealth and greatness cannot protect them from destruction when the measure of their iniquity is full and the measure of their vengeance has come. Great cities are easily overthrown when the great God comes to reckon with them. 2. He must tell them that it shall shortly be overthrown, at the end of forty days. It has a reprieve granted. So long God will wait to see if, upon this alarm given, they will humble themselves and amend their doings, and so prevent the ruin threatened. See how slow God is to wrath; though Nineveh's wickedness cried for vengeance, yet it shall be spared for forty days, that it may have space to repent and meet God in the way of his judgments. But he will wait no longer; if in that time they turn not, they shall know that he has *whe! his sword, and made it ready*. Forty days is



a long time for a righteous God to defer his judgments, yet it is but a little time for an unrighteous people to repent and reform in, and so turn away the judgments coming. The fixing of the day thus, with all possible assurance, would help to convince them that it was a message from God, for no man durst be so positive in fixing a time, however he might prognosticate the thing itself; it would also startle them into preparation for it. It may justly awaken secure sinners by a sincere conversion to prevent their own ruin when they see they have but a little time to turn in. And should it not awaken us to get ready for death, to consider that the thing itself is certain, and the time fixed in the counsel of God, but that we are kept in the dark and uncertainty about it in order that we may be always ready? We cannot be so sure that we shall live forty days as Nineveh now was that it should stand forty days; nay, I think it is more probable that we shall die within thirty or forty days than that we should live thirty or forty years; and so many years in the day of our security we are apt to promise ourselves.

Fleres, si scires unum tua tempora mensem;  
Rides, cum non sit forsitan una dies.

We should be alarmed if we were sure not to live a month, and yet we are careless, though we are not sure to live a day.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. 9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

Here is, I. A wonder of divine grace in

the repentance and reformation of Nineveh, upon the warning given them of their destruction approaching. *Verily I say unto you*, we have not found so great an instance of it, no, not in Israel; and it will *rise up in judgment against the men of the gospel-generation, and condemn them; for the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, but behold, a greater than Jonas is here*, Matt. xii. 41. Nay, it did condemn the impenitence and obstinacy of Israel at that time. God sent many prophets to Israel, and those well known among them to be *mighty in word and deed*; but to Nineveh he sent only one, and him a stranger, whose aspect was mean, we may suppose, and his *bodily presence weak*, especially after the fatigue of so long a journey; and yet they repented, but Israel repented not. Jonah preached but one sermon, and we do not find that he gave them any sign or wonder by the accomplishment of which his word might be confirmed; and yet they were wrought upon, while Israel continued obstinate, whose prophets chose out words wherewith to reason with them, and confirmed them by signs following. Jonah only threatened wrath and ruin; we do not find that he gave them any calls to repentance or directions how to repent, much less any encouragements to hope that they should find mercy if they did repent, and yet they repented; but Israel persisted in impenitence, though the prophets sent to them drew them *with cords of a man, and with bands of love*, and assured them of great things which God would do for them if they did repent and reform. Now let us see what was the method of Nineveh's repentance, what were the steps and particular instances of it.

1. They *believed God*; they gave credit to the word which Jonah spoke to them in the name of God: they believed that though they had many that they called gods, yet there was but *one living and true God*, the sovereign Lord of all,—that to him they were accountable,—that they had sinned against him and had become obnoxious to his justice,—that this notice sent them of ruin approaching came from him, and consequently that the ruin itself would come from him at the time prefixed if it were not prevented by a timely repentance,—that he is a merciful God, and there might be some hopes of the turning away of the wrath threatened, if they did turn away from the sins for which it was threatened. Note, Those that *come to God*, that come back to him after they have revolted from him, must believe, must believe that he is, that he is reconcilable, that he will be theirs if they take the right course. And observe what great faith God can work by very small, weak, and unlikely means; he can bring even Ninevites by a few threatening words to be *obedient to the faith*. Some think the Ninevites heard, from the mariners or others, or from Jonah himself, of his being cast into



the sea and delivered thence by miracle, and that this served for a confirmation of his mission, and brought them the more readily to believe God speaking by him. But of this we have no certainty. However, Christ's resurrection, typified by that of Jonah's, served for the confirmation of his gospel, and contributed abundantly to their great success who in his name *preached repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

2. They brought word to the king of Nineveh, who, some think, was at this time Sardanapalus, others Pul, king of Assyria. Jonah was not directed to go to him first, in respect to his royal dignity; crowned heads, when guilty heads, are before God upon a level with common heads, and therefore Jonah is not sent to the court, but to the streets of Nineveh, to make his proclamation. However, an account of his errand is brought to the king of Nineveh, not by way of information against Jonah, as a disturber of the public peace, that he might be silenced and punished, which perhaps would have been done if he had cried thus in the streets of Jerusalem, who *killed God's prophets and stoned those that were sent unto her.* No; the account was brought him of it, not as of a crime, but as a message from heaven, by some that were concerned for the public welfare, and whose hearts trembled for it. Note, Those kings are happy who have such about them as will give them notice of the things that belong to the kingdom's peace, of the warnings both of the word and of the providence of God, and of the tokens of God's displeasure which they are under; and those people are happy who have such kings over them as will take notice of those things.

3. The king set them a good example of humiliation, v. 6. When he heard of the word of God sent to him he *rose from his throne*, as Eglon king of Moab, who, when Ehud told him he had a message to him from God, *rose up out of his seat.* The king of Nineveh *rose from his throne*, not only in reverence to a word from God in general, but in fear of a word of wrath in particular, and in sorrow and shame for sin, by which he and his people had become obnoxious to his wrath. He rose from his royal throne, and laid aside his royal robe, the badge of his imperial dignity, as an acknowledgment that, having not used his power as he ought to have done for the restraining of violence and wrong, and the maintaining of right, he had forfeited his throne and robe to the justice of God, had rendered himself unworthy of the honour put upon him and the trust reposed in him as a king, and that it was just with God to take his kingdom from him. Even the king himself disdained not to put on the garb of a penitent, for he *covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes*, in token of his humiliation for sin and his dread of divine vengeance. It well becomes the great-

est of men to abase themselves before the great God.

4. The people conformed to the example of the king, nay, it should seem, they led the way, for they first began to *put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them*, v. 5. The least of them, that had least to lose in the overthrow of the city, did not think themselves unconcerned in the alarm; and the greatest of them, that were accustomed to lie at ease and live in state, did not think it below them to put on the marks of humiliation. The wearing of sackcloth, especially to those who were used to fine linen, was a very uneasy thing, and they would not have done it if they had not had a deep sense of their sin and their danger by reason of sin, which hereby they designed to express. Note, Those that would not be ruined must be humbled, those that would not destroy their souls must afflict their souls; when God's judgments threaten us we are concerned to *humble ourselves under his mighty hand*; and though bodily exercise alone profits nothing, and a man's *spreading sackcloth and ashes under him*, if that be all, is but a jest (it is the heart that God looks at, Isa. lviii. 5), yet on solemn days of humiliation, when God in his providence *calls to mourning and girding with sackcloth*, we must by the outward expressions of inward sorrow *glorify God with our bodies*, at least by laying aside their ornaments.

5. A general fast was proclaimed and observed throughout that great city, v. 7—9. It was ordered by the decree of the king and his nobles; the whole legislative power concurred in appointing it, and the whole body of the people concurred in observing it, and in both these ways it became a national act, and it was necessary that it should be so when it was to prevent a national ruin. We have here the contents of this proclamation, and it is very observable. See here,

(1.) What it is that is required by it. [1.] That the fast (properly so called) be very strictly observed. On the day appointed for this solemnity, *let neither man nor beast taste any thing*; let them not take the least refreshment, no, not so much as *drink water*; let them not plead that they cannot fast so long without prejudice to their health, or that they cannot bear it; let them try for once. What if they do feel it an uneasiness, and feel from it for some time after? It is better to submit to that than be wanting in any act or instance of that repentance which is necessary to save a sinking city. Let them make themselves uneasy in body by *putting on sackcloth*, as well as by fasting, to show how uneasy they are in mind, through sorrow for sin and the fear of divine wrath. Even the *beasts* must do penance as well as man, because they had been made *subject to vanity* as instruments of man's sin, and that, either by their complaints or their silent pining for want of meat, they might stir up



their owners, and those that attended them, to the expressions of sorrow and humiliation. Those cattle that were kept within doors must not be fed and watered as usual, because no meat must be stirring on that day. Things of that kind must be forgotten, and not minded. As when the psalmist was intent upon the praises of God he called upon the inferior creatures to join with him therein, so when the Ninevites were full of sorrow for sin, and dread of God's judgments, they would have the inferior creatures concur with them in the expressions of penitence. The beasts that used to be covered with rich and fine trappings, which were the pride of their masters, and theirs too, must now be *covered with sackcloth*; for the great men will (as becomes them) lay aside their equipage. [2.] With their fasting and mourning they must join prayer and supplication to God; for the fasting is designed to fit the body for the service of the soul in the duty of prayer, which is the main matter, and to which the other is but preparatory or subservient. *Let them cry mightily to God*; let even the brute creatures do it according to their capacity; let their cries and moans for want of food be graciously construed as cries to God, as the cries of the *young ravens* are (Job xxxviii. 41), and of the *young lions*, Ps. civ. 21. But especially let the men, women, and children, *cry to God*; let them *cry mightily* for the pardon of the sins which cry against them and the preventing of the judgments which were by Jonah cried against them. It was time to cry to God when there was but a step between them and ruin—high time to seek the Lord. In prayer we must cry mightily, with a fixedness of thought, firmness of faith, and fervour of pious and devout affections. By crying mightily we wrestle with God; we take hold of him; and we are concerned to do so when he is not only departing from us as a friend, but coming forth against us as an enemy. It therefore concerns us in prayer to stir up all that is within us. Yet this is not all; [3.] They must to their fasting and praying add reformation and amendment of life: *Let them turn every one from his evil way*, the evil way he has chosen, the evil way he is addicted to, and walks in, the evil way of his heart, and the evil way of his conversation, and particularly *from the violence that is in their hands*; let them restore what they have unjustly taken, and make reparation for what wrong they have done, and let them not any more oppress those they have power over nor defraud those they have dealings with; let the men in authority, at the court-end of the town, turn *from the violence that is in their hands*, and not decree *unrighteous decrees*, nor give wrong judgment upon appeals made to them. Let the men of business, at the trading-end of the town, turn *from the violence in their hands*, and use no unjust weights or measures, nor impose upon the ignorance or necessity of

those they trade with. Note, It is not enough to fast for sin, but we must fast from sin, and, in order to the success of our prayers, must no more *regard iniquity in our hearts*, Ps. lxxvi. 18. This is the *only fast that God has chosen* and will accept, Isa. lviii. 6; Zech. vii. 5, 9. The work of a fast-day is not done with the day; no, then the hardest and most needful part of the work begins, which is to turn from sin, and to live a new life, and not return with the dog to his vomit.

(2.) Upon what inducement this fast is proclaimed and religiously observed (v. 9): *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* Observe, [1.] What it is that they hope for—that God will, upon their repenting and turning, change his way towards them and revoke his sentence against them, that he will *turn from his fierce anger*, which they own they deserve and yet humbly and earnestly deprecate, and that thus their ruin will be prevented, and they perish not. They cannot object against the equity of the judgment, they pretend not to set it aside by appealing to a higher court, but hope in God himself, that he will repent, and that his own mercy (to which they fly) *shall rejoice against judgment*. They believe that God is justly angry with them, that, their sin being very heinous, his anger is very fierce, and that, if he proceed against them, there is no remedy, but they die, they perish, they all perish, and are undone; for who knows the power of his anger? It is not therefore the threatened overthrow that they pray for the prevention of, but the anger of God that they pray for the turning away of. As when we pray for the favour of God we pray for all good, so when we pray against the wrath of God we pray against all evil. [2.] What degree of hope they had of it: *Who can tell if God will turn to us?* Jonah had not told them; they had not among them any other prophets to tell them, so that they could not be so confident of finding mercy upon their repentance as we may be, who have the promise and oath of God to depend upon, and especially the merit and mediation of Christ to trust to, for pardon upon repentance. Yet they had a general notion of the goodness of God's nature, his mercy to man, and his being pleased with the repentance and conversion of sinners; and from this they raised some hopes that he would spare them; they dare not presume, but they will not despair. Note, Hope of mercy is the great encouragement to repentance and reformation; and though there be but some glimmerings of hope mixed with great fears arising from a sense of our own sinfulness, and unworthiness, and long abuse of divine patience, yet they may serve to quicken and engage our serious repentance and reformation. Let us boldly cast ourselves at the footstool of free grace, resolving that if we perish, we will perish there; yet who knows but God will look upon us with compassion?

II. Here is a wonder of divine mercy in the sparing of these Ninevites upon their repentance (v. 10): *God saw their works*; he not only heard their good words, by which they professed repentance, but saw their good works, by which they brought forth *fruits meet for repentance*; he saw that they *turned from their evil way*, and that was the thing he looked for and required. If he had not seen that, their fasting and sackcloth would have been as nothing in his account. He saw there was among them a general conviction of their sins and a general resolution not to return to them, and that for some days they lived better, and there was a new face of things upon the city; and this he was well pleased with. Note, God takes notice of every instance of the reformation of sinners, even those instances that fall not under the cognizance and observation of the world. He sees who turn from their evil way and who do not, and meets those with favour that meet him in a sincere conversion. When they repent of the evil of sin committed by them he repents of the evil of judgment pronounced against them. Thus he spared Nineveh, and *did not the evil which he said he would do against it*. Here were no sacrifices offered to God, that we read of, to make atonement for sin, but the *sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*, such as the Ninevites now had, is what he *will not despise*; it is what he will give countenance to and put honour upon.

## CHAP. IV.

We read, with a great deal of pleasure, in the close of the foregoing chapter, concerning the repentance of Nineveh; but in this chapter we read, with a great deal of uneasiness, concerning the sin of Jonah; and, as there is joy in heaven and earth for the conversion of sinners, so there is grief for the follies and infirmities of saints. In all the book of God we scarcely find a "servant of the Lord" (and such a one we are sure Jonah was, for the scripture calls him so) so very much out of temper as he is here, so very peevish and provoking to God himself. In the first chapter we had him fleeing from the face of God; but here we have him, in effect, flying in the face of God; and, which is more grievous to us, there we had an account of his repentance and return to God; but here, though no doubt he did repent, yet, as in Solomon's case, no account is left us of his recovering himself; but, while we read with wonder of his perverseness, we read with no less wonder of God's tenderness towards him, by which it appeared that he had not cast him off. Here is, I. Jonah's repining at God's mercy to Nineveh, and the fret he was in about it, ver. 1-3. II. The gentle reproof God gave him for it, ver. 4. III. Jonah's discontent at the withering of the gourd, and his justifying himself in that discontent, ver. 5-9. IV. God's improving it for his conviction, that he ought not to be angry at the sparing of Nineveh, ver. 10, 11. Man's badness and God's goodness serve here for a foil to each other, that the former may appear the more exceedingly sinful and the latter the more exceedingly gracious.

**B**UT it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is better*

for me to die than to live. 4 Then saith the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

See here, I. How unjustly Jonah quarrelled with God for his mercy to Nineveh, upon their repentance. This gives us occasion to suspect that Jonah had only delivered the message of wrath against the Ninevites, and had not at all assisted or encouraged them in their repentance, as one would think he should have done; for when they did repent, and found mercy,

1. Jonah *grudged* them the mercy they found (v. 1): *It displeased Jonah exceedingly*; and (would you think it?) *he was very angry*, was in a great heat about it. It was very wrong, (1.) That he had so little government of himself as to be displeased and very angry; he had *no rule over his own spirit*, and therefore, as a city broken down, lay exposed to temptations and snares. (2.) That he had so little reverence of God as to be displeased and angry at what he did, as David was when the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza; whatever pleases God should please us, and, though we cannot account for it, yet we must acquiesce in it. (3.) That he had so little affection to men as to be displeased and very angry at the conversion of the Ninevites and their reception into the divine favour. This was the sin of the scribes and Pharisees, who murmured at our Saviour because he entertained publicans and sinners; but is *our eye evil because his is good*? But why was Jonah so uneasy at it, that the Ninevites repented and were spared? It cannot be expected that we should give any good reason for a thing so very absurd and unreasonable; no, nor any thing that has the face or colour of a reason; but we may conjecture what the provocation was. Hot spirits are usually high spirits. *Only by pride comes contention* both with God and man. It was a point of honour that Jonah stood upon and that made him angry. [1.] He was jealous for the honour of his country; the repentance and reformation of Nineveh shamed the obstinacy of Israel that repented not, but *hated to be reformed*; and the favour God had shown to these Gentiles, upon their repentance, was an ill omen to the Jewish nation, as if they should be (as at length they were) rejected and cast out of the church and the Gentiles substituted in their room. When it was intimated to St. Peter himself that he should make no difference between Jews and Gentiles he startled at the thing, and said, *Not so, Lord*; no marvel then that Jonah looked upon it with regret that Nineveh should become a favourite. Jonah herein had a *zeal for God* as the God of Israel in a particular manner, *but not according to knowledge*. Note, Many are displeased with God under pretence of concern for his glory. [2.] He was jealous for his own honour, fearing lest, if Nineveh was not destroyed



within forty days, he should be accounted a false prophet, and stigmatized accordingly; whereas he needed not be under any discontent about that, for in the threatening of ruin it was implied that, for the preventing of it, they should repent, and, if they did, it should be prevented. And no one will complain of being deceived by him that is better than his word; and he would rather gain honour among them, by being instrumental to save them, than fall under any disgrace. But melancholy men (and such a one Jonah seems to have been) are apt to make themselves uneasy by fancying evils to themselves that are not, nor are ever likely to be. Most of our frets, as well as our frights, are owing to the power of imagination; and those are to be pitied as perfect bond-slaves that are under the power of such a tyrant.

2. He quarrelled with God about it. When his heart was hot within him, he *spoke unadvisedly with his lips*; and here he tells us what he said (v. 2, 3): He *prayed unto the Lord*, but it is a very awkward prayer, not like that which he prayed in the fish's belly; for affliction teaches us to pray submissively, which Jonah now forgot to do. Being in discontent, he applied to the duty of prayer, as he used to do in his troubles, but his corruptions got head of his graces, and, when he should have been praying for benefit by the mercy of God himself, he was complaining of the benefit others had by that mercy. Nothing could be spoken more unbecomingly. (1.) He now begins to justify himself in fleeing *from the presence of the Lord* when he was first ordered to go to Nineveh, for which he had before, with good reason, condemned himself: "*Lord*," said he, "*was not this my saying when I was in my own country? Did I not foresee that if I went to preach to Nineveh they would repent, and thou wouldst forgive them, and then thy word would be reflected upon and reproached as yea and nay?*" What a strange sort of man was Jonah, to dread the success of his ministry! Many have been tempted to withdraw from their work because they have despaired of doing good by it, but Jonah declined preaching because he was afraid of doing good by it; and still he persists in the same corrupt notion, for, it seems, the whale's belly itself could not cure him of it. It was his saying when he was *in his own country*, but it was a bad saying; yet here he stands to it, and, very unlike the other prophets, *desires the woeful day* which he had foretold and grieves because it does not come. Even Christ's disciples *know not what manner of spirit they are of*; those did not who wished for fire from heaven upon the city that did not receive them, much less did Jonah, who wished for fire from heaven upon the city that did receive him, Luke ix. 55. Jonah thinks he has reason to complain of that, when it is done, which he was before afraid of; so hard is it to get a root

of bitterness plucked out of the mind, when once it is fastened there. And why did Jonah expect that God would spare Nineveh? *Because I knew that thou wast a gracious God, indulgent and easily pleased, that thou wast slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.* All this is very true; and Jonah could not but know it by God's proclamation of his name and the experiences of all ages; but it is strange and very unaccountable that that which all the saints had made the matter of their joy and praise Jonah should make the matter of reflection upon God, as if that were an imperfection of the divine nature which is indeed the greatest glory of it—that God is *gracious and merciful*. The servant that said, *I knew thee to be a hard man*, said that which was false, and yet, had it been true, it was not the proper matter of a complaint; but Jonah, though he says 'what is true, yet, speaking it by way of reproach, speaks very absurdly. Those have a spirit of contention and contradiction indeed that can find in their hearts to quarrel with the goodness of God, and his sparing pardoning mercy, to which we all owe it that we are out of hell. This is making that to be to us a *savour of death unto death* which ought to be a *savour of life unto life*. (2.) In a passion, he wishes for death (v. 3), a strange expression of his causeless passion! "*Now, O Lord! take, I beseech thee, my life from me.* If Nineveh must live, let me die, rather than see thy word and mine disproved, rather than see the glory of Israel transferred to the Gentiles," as if there were not grace enough in God both for Jews and Gentiles, or as if his countrymen were the further off from mercy for the Ninevites being taken into favour. When the prophet Elijah had laboured in vain, he wished he might die, and it was his infirmity, 1 Kings xix. 4. But Jonah labours to good purpose, saves a great city from ruin, and yet wishes he may die, as if, having done much good, he were afraid of living to do more; he *sees of the travail of his soul, and is dissatisfied*. What a perverse spirit is mingled with every word he says! When Jonah was brought alive out of the whale's belly, he thought life a very valuable mercy, and was thankful to that God who brought up *his life from corruption*, (ch. ii. 6), and a great blessing his life had been to Nineveh; yet now, for that very reason, it became a burden to himself and he begs to be eased of it, pleading, *It is better for me to die than to live*. Such a word as this may be the language of grace, as it was in Paul, who desired to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*; but here it was the language of folly, and passion, and strong corruption; and so much the worse, [1.] Jonah being now in the midst of his usefulness, and therefore fit to live. He was one whose ministry God wonderfully owned and prospered. The conversion of Nineveh might give him hopes of being



instrumental to convert the whole kingdom of Assyria; it was therefore very absurd for him to wish he might die when he had a prospect of living to so good a purpose and could be so ill spared. [2.] Jonah being now so much out of temper and therefore unfit to die. How durst he think of dying, and going to appear before God's judgment-seat, when he was actually quarrelling with him? Was this a frame of spirit proper for a man to go out of the world in? But those who passionately desire death commonly have least reason to do it, as being very much unprepared for it. Our business is to get ready to die by doing the work of life, and then to refer ourselves to God to take away our life when and how he pleases.

II. See how justly God reproved Jonah for this heat that he was in (v. 4): The Lord said, *Doest thou well to be angry? Is doing well a displeasure to thee?* so some read it. What! dost thou repent of thy good deeds? God might justly have rejected him for this impious heat which he was in, might justly have taken him at his word, and have struck him dead when he wished to die; but he vouchsafes to reason with him for his conviction and to bring him to a better temper, as the father of the prodigal reasoned with his elder son, when, as Jonah here, he murmured at the remission and reception of his brother. *Doest thou well to be angry?* See how mildly the great God speaks to this foolish man, to teach us to restore those that have fallen with a *spirit of meekness*, and with *soft answers to turn away wrath*. God appeals to himself and to his own conscience: *Doest thou well?* Thou knowest thou dost not." We should often put this question to ourselves, Is it well to say thus, to do thus? Can I justify it? Must I not unsay it and undo it again by repentance, or be undone for ever? Ask, 1. Do I well to be angry? When passion is up, let it meet with this check, "Do I well to be so soon angry, so often angry, so long angry, to put myself into such a heat, and to give others such ill language in my anger? Is this well, that I suffer these headstrong passions to get dominion over me?" 2. "Do I well to be angry at the mercy of God to repenting sinners?" That was Jonah's crime. Do we well to be angry at that which is so much for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom among men—to be angry at that which angels rejoice in and for which abundant thanksgivings will be rendered to God? We do ill to be angry at that grace which we ourselves need and are undone without; if room were not left for repentance, and hope given of pardon upon repentance, what would become of us? Let the conversion of sinners, which is the joy of heaven, be our joy, and never our grief.

5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city,

and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. 7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. 8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is better for me to die than to live*. 9 And God said to Jonah, *Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?* And he said, I do well to be angry, *even unto death*. 10 Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also much cattle?*

Jonah persists here in his discontent; for the *beginning of strife* both with God and man is as the *letting forth of waters*, the breach grows wider and wider, and, when passion gets head, bad is made worse; it should therefore be silenced and suppressed at first. We have here,

I. Jonah's sullen expectation of the fate of Nineveh. We may suppose that the Ninevites, giving credit to the message he brought, were ready to give entertainment to the messenger that brought it, and to show him respect, that they would have made him welcome to the best of their houses and tables. But Jonah was out of humour, would not accept their kindness, nor behave towards them with common civility, which one might have feared would have prejudiced them against him and his word; but when there is not only the *treasure* put into *earthen vessels*, but the trust lodged with men *subject to like passions as we are*, and yet the point gained, it must be owned that the *excellency of the power* appears so much the more to be of God and not of man. Jonah retires, goes out of the city, sits alone, and keeps silence, because he sees the Ninevites repent and reform, v. 5. Perhaps he told those about him that he went out of the city



for fear of perishing in the ruins of it; but he went to see what would become of the city, as Abraham went up to see what would become of Sodom, Gen. xix. 27. The forty days were now expiring, or had expired, and Jonah hoped that, if Nineveh was not overthrown, yet some judgment or other would come upon it, sufficient to save his credit; however, it was with great uneasiness that he waited the issue. He would not sojourn in a house, expecting it would fall upon his head, but he made himself a booth of the boughs of trees, and sat in that, though there he would lie exposed to wind and weather. Note, It is common for those that have fretful uneasy spirits industriously to create inconveniences themselves, that, resolving to complain, they may still have something to complain of.

II. God's gracious provision for his shelter and refreshment when he thus foolishly afflicted himself and was still adding yet more and more to his own affliction, v. 6. Jonah was sitting in his booth, fretting at the cold of the night and the heat of the day, which were both grievous to him, and God might have said, It is his own choice, his own doing, a house of his own building, let him make the best of it; but he looked on him with compassion, as the tender mother does on the froward child, and relieved him against the grievances which he by his own wilfulness created to himself. He prepared a gourd, a plant with broad leaves, and full of them, that suddenly grew up, and covered his hut or booth, so as to keep off much of the injury of the cold and heat. It was a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief, that, being refreshed in body, he might the better guard against the uneasiness of his mind, which outward crosses and troubles are often the occasion and increase of. See how tender God is of his people in their afflictions, yea, though they are foolish and froward, nor is he extreme to mark what they do amiss. God had before prepared a great fish to secure Jonah from the injuries of the water, and here a great gourd to secure him from the injuries of the air; for he is the protector of his people against evils of every kind, has the command of plants as well as animals, and can soon prepare them, to make them serve his purposes, can make their growth sudden, which, in a course of nature, is slow and gradual. A gourd, one would think, was but a slender fortification at the best, yet Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd; for, 1. It was really at that time a great comfort to him. A thing in itself small and inconsiderable, yet, coming seasonably, may be to us a very valuable blessing. A gourd in the right place may do us more service than a cedar. The least creatures may be great plagues (as flies and lice were to Pharaoh) or great comforts (as the gourd to Jonah), according as God is pleased to make them. 2. He being now much

under the power of imagination took a greater complacency in it than there was cause for. He was exceedingly glad of it, was proud of it, and triumphed in it. Note, Persons of strong passions, as they are apt to be cast down with a trifle that crosses them, so they are apt to be lifted up with a trifle that pleases them. A small toy will serve sometimes to pacify a cross child, as the gourd did Jonah. But wisdom and grace would teach us both to weep for our troubles as though we wept not, and to rejoice in our comforts as though we rejoiced not. Creature-comforts we ought to enjoy and be thankful for, but we need not be exceedingly glad of them; it is God only that must be our exceeding joy, Ps. xliii. 4.

III. The sudden loss of this provision which God had made for his refreshment, and the return of his trouble, v. 7, 8. God that had provided comfort for him provided also an affliction for him in that very thing which was his comfort; the affliction did not come by chance, but by divine direction and appointment. 1. God prepared a worm to destroy the gourd. He that gave took away, and Jonah ought to have blessed his name in both; but because, when he took the comfort of the gourd, he did not give God the praise of it, God deprived him of the benefit of it, and justly. See what all our creature-comforts are, and what we may expect them to be; they are gourds, have their root in the earth, are but a thin and slender defence compared with the rock of ages; they are withering things; they perish in the using, and we are soon deprived of the comfort of them. The gourd withered the next day after it sprang up; our comforts come forth like flowers and are soon cut down. When we please ourselves most with them, and promise ourselves most from them, we are disappointed. A little thing withers them; a small worm at the root destroys a large gourd. Something unseen and undiscerned does it. Our gourds wither, and we know not what to attribute it to. And perhaps those wither first that we have been more exceedingly glad of; that proves least safe that is most dear. God did not send an angel to pluck up Jonah's gourd, but sent a worm to smite it; there it grew still, but it stood him in no stead. Perhaps our creature-comforts are continued to us, but they are embittered; the creature is continued, but the comfort is gone; and the remains, or ruins of it rather, do but upbraid us with our folly in being exceedingly glad of it. 2. He prepared a wind to make Jonah feel the want of the gourd, v. 8. It was a vehement east wind, which drove the heat of the rising sun violently upon the head of Jonah. This wind was not as a fan to abate the heat, but as bellows to make it more intense. Thus poor Jonah lay open to sun and wind.

IV. The further fret that this put Jonah

into (v. 8): *He fainted, and wished in himself that he might die.* "If the gourd be killed, if the gourd be dealt, kill me too, *let me die with the gourd.*" Foolish man, that thinks his life bound up in the life of a weed! Note, It is just that those who love to complain should never be left without something to complain of, that their folly may be manifested and corrected, and, if possible, cured. And see here how the passions that run into an extreme one way commonly run into an extreme the other way. Jonah, who was in transports of joy when the gourd flourished, is in pangs of grief when the gourd has withered. Inordinate affection lays a foundation for inordinate affliction; what we are over-fond of when we have it we are apt to over-grieve for when we lose it, and we may see our folly in both.

V. The rebuke God gave him for this; he again reasoned with him: *Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd?* v. 9. Note, The withering of a gourd is a thing which it does not become us to be angry at. When afflicting providences deprive us of our relations, possessions, and enjoyments, we must bear it patiently, must not be angry at God, must not be angry *for the gourd.* It is comparatively but a small loss, the loss of a shadow; that is the most we can make of it. It was a gourd, a withering thing; we could expect no other than that it should wither. Our being angry for the withering of it will not recover it; we ourselves shall shortly wither like it. If one gourd be withered, another gourd may spring up in the room of it; but that which should especially silence our discontent is that though our gourd be gone our God is not gone, and there is enough in him to make up all our losses.

Let us therefore own that we do ill, that we do very ill, to be angry for the gourd; and let us under such events quiet ourselves *as a child that is weaned from his mother.*

VI. His justification of his passion and discontent; and it is very strange, v. 9. He said, *I do well to be angry, even unto death.* It is bad to speak amiss, yet if it be in haste, if what is said amiss be speedily recalled and unsaid again, it is the more excusable; but to speak amiss and stand to it is bad indeed. So Jonah did here, though God himself rebuked him, and by appealing to his conscience expected he would rebuke himself. See what brutish things ungoverned passions are, and how much it is our interest, and ought to be our endeavour, to chain up these roaring lions and ranging bears. *Sin and death* are two very dreadful things, yet Jonah, in his heat, makes light of them both. 1. He has so little regard for God as to fly in the face of his authority, and to say that he did well in that which God said was ill done. Passion often over-rules conscience, and forces it, when it is appealed to, to give a false judgment, as Jonah here did. 2. He has so little regard to himself as to abandon

his own life, and to think it no harm to indulge his passion even to death, to kill himself with fretting. We read of *wrath that kills the foolish man*, and *envy that slays the silly one* (Job v. 2), and foolish silly ones indeed those are that cut their own throats with their own passions, that fret themselves into consumptions and other weaknesses, and put themselves into fevers with their own intemperate heats.

VII. The improvement of it against him for his conviction that he did ill to murmur at the sparing of Nineveh. Out of his own mouth God will judge him; and we have reason to think it overcame him; for he made no reply, but, we hope, returned to his right mind and recovered his temper, though he could not keep it, and all was well. Now,

1. Let us see how God argued with him (v. 10, 11): "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd, hast spared it*" (so the word is), "*didst what thou couldst, and wouldst have done more, to keep it alive, and saidst, What a pity it is that this gourd should ever wither! and should not I then spare Nineveh?*" Should not I have as much compassion upon that as thou hadst upon the gourd, and forbid the earthquake which would ruin that, as thou wouldst have forbidden the worm that smote the gourd? Consider," (1.) "The gourd thou hadst pity on was but one; but the inhabitants of Nineveh, whom I have pity on, are numerous." It is a great city and very populous, as appears by the number of the infants, suppose from two years old and under; there are 120,000 such in Nineveh, that have not come to so much use of understanding as to know *their right hand from their left*, for they are yet but babes. These are taken notice of because the age of infants is commonly looked upon as the age of innocence. So many there were in Nineveh that had not been guilty of any actual transgression, and consequently had not themselves contributed to the common guilt, and yet, if Nineveh had been overthrown, they would all have been involved in the common calamity; "*and shall not I spare Nineveh then, with an eye to them?*" God has a tender regard to little children, and is ready to pity and succour them, nay, here a whole city is spared for their sakes, which may encourage parents to present their children to God by faith and prayer, that though they are not capable of doing him any service (for they cannot discern *between their right hand and their left*, between good and evil, sin and duty), yet they are capable of participating in his favours and of obtaining salvation. The great Saviour discovered a particular kindness for the children that were brought to him, when he *took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.* Nay, God took notice of the abundance of cattle too that were in Nineveh, which he had more reason to pity and spare than Jonah had to pity and to spare the gourd,



inasmuch as the animal life is more excellent than the vegetable. (2.) The gourd which Jonah was concerned for was none of his own; it was that for which he did not labour and which he made not to grow; but the persons in Nineveh whom God had compassion on were all the *work of his own hands*, whose being he was the author of, whose lives he was the preserver of, whom he planted and made to grow; he made them, and his they were, and therefore he had much more reason to have compassion on them, for he cannot *despise the work of his own hands* (Job x. 3); and thus Job there argues with him (v. 8, 9), *Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me, have made me as the clay; and wilt thou destroy me, wilt thou bring me into dust again?* And thus he here argues with himself. 3. The gourd which Jonah had pity on was of a sudden growth, and therefore of less value; it *came up in a night, it was the son of a night* (so the word is); but Nineveh is an ancient city, of many ages standing, and therefore cannot be so easily given up; "the persons I spare have been many years in growing up, not so soon reared as the gourd; and shall not I then have pity on those that have been so many years the care of my providence, so many years my tenants?" (4.) The gourd which Jonah had pity on *perished in a night*; it withered, and there was an end of it. But the precious souls in Nineveh that God had pity on are not so short-lived; they are immortal, and therefore to be carefully and tenderly considered. One soul is of more value than the whole world, and the gain of the world will not countervail the loss of it; surely then one soul is of more value than many gourds, of more value than many sparrows; so God accounts, and so should we, and therefore have a greater concern for the children of men than for any of the inferior creatures, and for our own and others'

precious souls than for any of the riches and enjoyments of this world.

2. From all this we may learn, (1.) That though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it, but will take a course effectually to show them their error, and to bring them to themselves and to their right mind again. We have reason to hope that Jonah, after this, was well reconciled to the sparing of Nineveh, and was as well pleased with it as ever he had been displeased. (2.) That God will justify himself in the methods of his grace towards repenting returning sinners as well as in the course his justice takes with those that persist in their rebellion; though there be those that murmur at the mercy of God, because they do not understand it (for his thoughts and ways therein are as far above ours as heaven above the earth), yet he will make it evident that therein he acts like himself, and will be *justified when he speaks*. See what pains he takes with Jonah to convince him that it is very fit that Nineveh should be spared. Jonah had said, *I do well to be angry*, but he could not prove it. God says and proves it, *I do well to be merciful*; and it is a great encouragement to poor sinners to hope that they shall find mercy with him, that he is so ready to justify himself in showing mercy and to triumph in those whom he makes the monuments of it, against those whose eye is evil because his is good. Such murmurers shall be made to understand this doctrine, that, how narrow soever their souls, their principles, are, and how willing soever they are to engross divine grace to themselves and those of their own way, there is *one Lord over all, that is rich in mercy to all that call upon him*, and in every nation, in Nineveh as well as in Israel, *he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him*; he that repents, and turns from his evil way, shall find mercy with him.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

# M I C A H.

WE shall have some account of this prophet in the first verse of the book of his prophecy; and therefore shall here only observe that, being contemporary with the prophet Isaiah (only that he began to prophesy a little after him), there is a near resemblance between that prophet's pro-

phesy and this; and there is a prediction of the advancement and establishment of the gospel-church, which both of them have, almost in the same words, that out of the mouth of two such witnesses so great a word might be established. Compare Isa. ii. 2, 3, with Mic. iv. 1, 2. Isaiah's prophecy is said to be concerning *Judah and Jerusalem*, but Micah's concerning *Samaria and Jerusalem*; for, though this prophecy be dated only by the reigns of the kings of Judah, yet it refers to the kingdom of Israel, the approaching ruin of which, in the captivity of the ten tribes, he plainly foretels and sadly laments. What we find here in writing was but an abstract of the sermons he preached during the reigns of three kings. The scope of the whole is, 1. To convince sinners of their sins, by setting them in order before them, charging both Israel and Judah with idolatry, covetousness, oppression, contempt of the word of God, and their rulers especially, both in church and state, with the abuse of their power; and also by showing them the judgments of God ready to break in upon them for their sins. 11. To comfort God's people with promises of mercy and deliverance, especially with an assurance of the coming of the Messiah and of the grace of the gospel through him. It is remarkable concerning this prophecy, and confirms its authority, that we find two quotations out of it made publicly upon very solemn occasions, and both referring to very great events. 1. One is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (*ch. iii. 12*), which we find quoted in the Old Testament, by the *elders of the land* (*Jer. xxvi. 17, 18*), in justification of Jeremiah, when he foretold the judgments of God coming upon Jerusalem, and to stay the proceedings of the court against him. "Micah (say they) foretold that *Zion should be ploughed as a field*, and Hezekiah did not put him to death; why then should we punish Jeremiah for saying the same?" 2. Another is a prediction of the birth of Christ (*ch. v. 2*) which we find quoted in the New Testament, by the *chief priests and scribes of the people*, in answer to Herod's enquiry, *where Christ should be born* (*Matt. ii. 5 &c*); for still we find that to him bear all the prophets witness.

## CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, 1. The title of the book (*ver. 1*) and a preface demanding attention, *ver. 2*. II. Warning given of desolating judgments hastening upon the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (*ver. 3, 4*), and all for sin, *ver. 5*. III. The particulars of the destruction specified, *ver. 6, 7*. IV. The greatness of the destruction illustrated, 1. By the prophet's sorrow for it, *ver. 8, 9*. 2. By the general sorrow that should be for it, in the several places that must expect to share in it, *ver. 10-16*. These prophecies of Micah might well be called his lamentations.

THE word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. 2 Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. 3 For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. 4 And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. 5 For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? 6 Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. 7 And all the graven

images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of a harlot, and they shall return to the hire of a harlot.

Here is, I. A general account of this prophet and his prophecy, *v. 1*. This is prefixed for the satisfaction of all that read and hear the prophecy of this book, who will give the more credit to it when they know the author and his authority. 1. The prophecy is the *word of the Lord*; it is a divine revelation. Note, What is written in the Bible, and what is preached by the ministers of Christ according to what is written there, must be heard and received, not as the word of dying men, which we may be judges of, but as the word of the living God, which we must be judged by, for so it is. This word of the Lord came to the prophet, came plainly, came powerfully, came in a preventing way, and he saw it, saw the vision in which it was conveyed to him, saw the things themselves which he foretold, with as much clearness and certainty as if they had been already accomplished. 2. The prophet is Micah the Morasthite; his name *Micah* is a contraction of *Micaiah*, the name of a prophet some ages before (in Ahab's time, 1 Kings xxii. 8); his surname, the *Morasthite*, signifies that he was born, or lived, at Moresheth, which is mentioned here (*v. 14*), or Maresah, which is mentioned *v. 15*, and Josh. xv. 44. The place of his abode is mentioned, that any one might enquire in that place, at that time, and might find there was, or had been, such a one there, who was generally reputed to be a prophet. 3. The date of his pro-



phesy is in the reigns of three kings of Judah—Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Ahaz was one of the worst of Judah's kings, and Hezekiah one of the best; such variety of times pass over God's ministers, times that frown and times that smile, to each of which they must study to accommodate themselves, and to arm themselves against the temptations of both. The promises and threatenings of this book are interwoven, by which it appears that even in the wicked reign he preached comfort, and said to the *righteous* then that it should be *well with them*; and that in the pious reign he preached conviction, and said to the wicked then that it should be *ill with them*; for, however the times change, the word of the Lord is still the same. 4. The parties concerned in this prophecy; it is concerning *Samaria and Jerusalem*, the head cities of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, under the influence of which the kingdoms themselves were. Though the ten tribes have deserted the houses both of David and Aaron, yet God is pleased to send prophets to them.

II. A very solemn introduction to the following prophecy (v. 2), in which, 1. The people are summoned to draw near and give their attendance, as upon a court of judicature: *Hear, all you people*. Note, Where God has a mouth to speak we must have an ear to hear; we all must, for we are all concerned in what is delivered. "*Hear, you people*" (*all of them*, so the margin reads it), "all you that are now within hearing, and all others that hear it at second hand." It is an unusual construction; but those words with which Micah begins his prophecy are the very same in the original with those wherewith Micaiah ended his, 1 Kings xxii. 28. 2. The earth is called upon, with *all that therein is*, to hear what the prophet has to say: *Hearken, O earth!* The earth shall be made to shake under the stroke and weight of the judgments coming; sooner will the earth hear than this stupid senseless people; but God will be heard when he pleads. If the church, and those in it, will not hear, the earth, and those in it, shall, and shame them. 3. God himself is appealed to, and his omniscience, power, and justice, are vouched in testimony against this people: "*Let the Lord God be witness against you*, a witness that you had fair warning given you, that your prophets did their duty faithfully as watchmen, but you would not take the warning; let the accomplishment of the prophecy be a witness against your contempt and disbelief of it, and prove, to your conviction and confusion, that it was the word of God, and no word of his shall fall to the ground." Note, God himself will be a witness, by the judgments of his hand, against those that would not receive his testimony in the judgments of his mouth. He will be a witness *from his holy temple* in heaven, when he comes down to execute judgment

(v. 3) against those that turned a deaf ear to his oracles, wherein he witnessed to them, out of his holy temple at Jerusalem.

III. A terrible prediction of destroying judgments which should come upon Judah and Israel, which had its accomplishment soon after in Israel, and at length in Judah; for it is foretold, 1. That God himself will appear against them, v. 3. They boasted of themselves and their relation to God, as if that would secure them; but, though God never deceives the faith of the upright, he will disappoint the presumption of the hypocrites, for, *behold, the Lord comes forth out of his place*, quits his mercy-seat, where they thought they had him fast, and prepares his throne for judgment; his glory departs, for they drive it from them. God's way towards this people had long been a way of mercy, but now he changes his way, he *comes out of his place*, and will come down. He had seemed to retire, as one regardless of what was done, but now he will show himself, he will *rend the heavens* and will *come down*, not as sometimes, in surprising mercies, but in surprising judgments, to do things not for them, but against them, which they *looked not for*, Isa. lxiv. 1; xxvi. 21. 2. That when the Creator appears against them it shall be in vain for any creature to appear for them. He will *tread with contempt* and disdain *upon the high places* of the earth, upon all the powers that are advanced in competition with him or in opposition to him; and he will so tread upon them as to tread them down and level them. High places, set up for the worship of idols or for military fortifications, shall all be trodden down and trampled into the dust. Do men trust to the height and strength of the mountains and rocks, as if they were sufficient to bear up their hopes and bear off their fears? They shall be *moltten under him*, melted down as *wax before the fire*, Ps. lxxviii. 2. Do they trust to the fruitfulness of the valleys, and their products? They shall be *cleft*, or rent, with those *fiery streams* that shall come pouring down from the mountains when they are melted. They shall be ploughed and washed away as the ground is by the *waters that are poured down a steep place*. God is said to *cleave the earth with rivers*, Hab. iii. 9. Neither men of *high degree*, as the mountains, nor men of *low degree*, as the valleys, shall be able to secure either themselves or the land from the judgments of God, when they are sent with commission to lay all waste, and, like a *sweeping rain*, to *leave no food*, Prov. xxviii. 3. This is applied particularly to the head city of Israel, which they hoped would be a protection to the kingdom (v. 6): *I will make Samaria*, that is now a rich and populous city, as a *heap of the field*, as a heap of dung laid there to be spread, or as a heap of stones gathered together to be carried away, and as *plantings of a vineyard*, as hillocks of earth raised to plant vines in

God will make of that city a heap, of that defenced city a ruin, Isa. xxv. 2. Their altars had been as heaps in the furrows of the fields (Hos. xii. 11) and now their houses shall be so, as ruinous heaps. The stones of the city are poured down into the valley by the fury of the conqueror, who will thus be revenged on those walls that so long held out against him. They shall be quite pulled down, so that the very foundations shall be discovered, that had been covered by the superstructure; and not one stone shall be left upon another.

IV. A charge of sin upon them, as the procuring cause of these desolating judgments (v. 5): *For the transgression of Jacob is all this.* If it be asked, "Why is God so angry, and why are Jacob and Israel thus brought to ruin by his anger?" the answer is ready: Sin has done all the mischief; sin has laid all waste; all the calamities of Jacob and Israel are owing to their transgressions; if they had not gone away from God, he would never have appeared thus against them. Note, External privileges and professions will not secure a sinful people from the judgments of God. If sin be found in the house of Israel, if Jacob be guilty of transgression and rebellion, God will not spare them; no, he will punish them first, for their sins are of all others most provoking to him, for they are most reproaching. But it is asked, *What is the transgression of Jacob?* Note, When we feel the smart of sin it concerns us to enquire what the sin is which we smart for, that we may particularly war against that which wars against us. And what is it? 1. It is idolatry; it is the high places; that is the transgression, the great transgression, which reigns in Israel; that is spiritual whoredom, the violation of the marriage-covenant, which merits a divorce. Even the high places of Judah, though not so bad as the transgression of Jacob, were yet offensive enough to God, and a remaining blemish upon some of the good reigns. *Howbeit the high places were not taken away.* 2. It is the idolatry of Samaria and Jerusalem, the royal cities of those two kingdoms. These were the most populous places, and where there were most people there was most wickedness, and they made one another worse. These were the most pompous places; there men lived most in wealth and pleasure, and they forgot God. These were the places that had the greatest influence upon the country, by authority and example; so that from them idolatry and profaneness went forth throughout all the land, Jer. xxiii. 15. Note, Spiritual distempers are most contagious in persons and places that are most conspicuous. If the head city of a kingdom, or the chief family in a parish, be vicious and profane, many will follow their pernicious ways, and write after a bad copy when great ones set it for them. The vices of leaders and rulers are leading ruling vices, and therefore shall be surely and sorely punished. Those have

a great deal to answer for indeed that not only sin, but make Israel to sin. Those must expect to be made examples that have been examples of wickedness. If the transgression of Jacob is Samaria, therefore shall Samaria become a heap. Let the ringleaders in sin hear this and fear.

V. The punishment made to answer the sin, in the particular destruction of the idols, v. 7. 1. The gods they worshipped shall be destroyed: *The graven images shall be beaten to pieces by the army of the Assyrians, and all the idols shall be laid desolate. Samaria and her idols were ruined together by Sennacherib (Isa. x. 11), and their gods cast into the fire, for they were no gods (Isa. xxxvii. 19); and this was the Lord's doing: I will lay the idols desolate.* Note, If the law of God prevail not to make men in authority destroy idols, God will take the work into his own hands, and will do it himself. 2. The gifts that passed between them and their gods shall be destroyed; for *all the hires thereof shall be burnt with fire*, which may be meant either of the presents they made to their idols for the replenishing of their altars, and the adorning of their statues and temples (these shall become a prey to the victorious army, which shall rifle not only private houses, but the houses of their gods), or of the corn, and wine, and oil, which they called the rewards, or hires, which their idols, their lovers, gave them (Hos. ii. 12); these shall be taken from them by him whom (by ascribing them to their dear idols) they had defrauded of the honour due to him. Note, That cannot prosper by which men either are hired to sin or hire others to sin; for *the wages of sin will be death.* *She gathered it of the hire of the harlot, and it shall return to the hire of a harlot.* They enriched themselves by their leagues with the idolatrous nations, who gave them advantages, to court them into the service of their idols, and their idols' temples were enriched with gifts by those who went a whoring after them. And all this wealth shall become a prey to the idolatrous nations, and so be the hire of a harlot again, wages to an army of idolaters, who shall take it as a reward given them by their gods. *It shall be a present to king Jareb, Hos. x. 6.* What they gave to their idols, and what they thought they got by them, shall be as the hire of a harlot; the curse of God shall be upon it, and it shall never prosper, nor do them any good. It is common that what is squeezed out by one lust is squandered away upon another.

8 Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. 9 For her wound is incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.



10 Declare ye *it* not at Gath, weep ye not at all: in the house of Aphrah roll thyself in the dust. 11 Pass ye away, thou inhabitant of Saphir, having thy shame naked: the inhabitant of Zaanan came not forth in the mourning of Beth-ezel; he shall receive of you his standing. 12 For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the LORD unto the gate of Jerusalem. 13 O thou inhabitant of Lachish, bind the chariot to the swift beast: she *is* the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee. 14 Therefore shalt thou give presents to Moresheth-gath: the houses of Achzib *shall be* a lie to the kings of Israel. 15 Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah: he shall come unto Adullam the glory of Israel. 16 Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

We have here a long train of mourners attending the funeral of a ruined kingdom.

I. The prophet is himself chief mourner (v. 8, 9): *I will wail and howl; I will go stripped and naked*, as a man distracted with grief. The prophets usually expressed their own grief for the public grievances, partly to mollify the predictions of them, and to make it appear that it was not out of ill-will that they denounced the judgments of God (so far were they from desiring the woeful day that they dreaded it more than any thing), partly to show how very dreadful and mournful the calamities would be, and to stir up in the people a holy fear of them, that by repentance they might turn away the wrath of God. Note, We ought to lament the punishments of sinners as well as the sufferings of saints in this world; the weeping prophet did so (Jer. ix. 1); so did this prophet. He *makes a wailing like the dragons*, or rather the *jackalls*, ravenous beasts that in those countries used to meet in the night, and *howl*, and make *hideous noises*; he mourns *as the owls*, the *screech-owls*, or *ostriches*, as some read it. Two things the prophet here thus dolefully laments:—1. That Israel's case is desperate: *Her wound is incurable*; it is ruin without remedy; man cannot help her; God will not, because she will not by repentance and reformation help herself. There is indeed balm in Gilead and a physician there; but they will not apply to the physician, nor

apply the balm to themselves, and therefore *the wound is incurable*. 2. That Judah likewise is in danger. The cup is going round, and is now put into Judah's hand: *The enemy has come to the gate of Jerusalem*. Soon after the destruction of Samaria and the ten tribes, the Assyrian army, under Sennacherib, laid siege to Jerusalem, came to the gate, but could not force their way any further; however, it was with great concern and trouble that the prophet foresaw the fright, so dearly did he love the peace of Jerusalem.

II. Several places are here brought in mourning, and are called upon to mourn; but with this proviso, that they should not let the Philistines hear them (v. 10): *Declare it not in Gath*; this is borrowed from David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 20), *Tell it not in Gath*, for the uncircumcised will triumph in Israel's tears. Note, One would not, if it could be helped, gratify those that make themselves and their companions merry with the sins or with the sorrows of God's Israel. David was silent, and stifled his griefs, when *the wicked were before him*, Ps. xxxix. 1. But, though it may be prudent not to give way to a noisy sorrow, yet it is duty to admit a silent one when the church of God is in distress. "*Roll thyself in the dust*" (as great mourners used to do) "and so let the house of Judah and every house in Jerusalem become a *house of Aphrah*, a *house of dust*, covered with dust, crumbled into dust." When God makes the house dust it becomes us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, and to put our mouths in the dust, thus accommodating ourselves to the providences that concern us. Dust we are; God brings us to the dust, that we may know it, and own it. Divers other places are here named that should be sharers in this universal mourning, the names of some of which we do not find elsewhere, whence it is conjectured that they are names put upon them by the prophet, the signification of which might either indicate or aggravate the miseries coming upon them, thereby to awaken this secure and stupid people to a holy fear of divine wrath. We find Sennacherib's invasion thus described, in the prediction of it, by the impressions of terror it should make upon the several cities that fell in his way, Isa. x. 23, 29, &c. Let us observe the particulars here, 1. *The inhabitants of Saphir*, which signifies *neat and beautiful* (thou that dwellest fairly, so the margin reads it), shall *pass away* into captivity, or be forced to flee, stripped of all their ornaments and *having their shame naked*. Note, Those who appear ever so fine and delicate know not what contempt they may be exposed to; and the more grievous will the shame be to those who have been inhabitants of Saphir. 2. *The inhabitants of Zaanan*, which signifies *the country of flocks*, a populous country, where the people are as



numerous and thick as flocks of sheep, shall yet be so taken up with their own calamities, felt or feared, that they shall *not come forth in the mourning of Bethel*, which signifies a place near, shall not condole with, nor bring any succour to, their next neighbours in distress; for *he shall receive of you his standing*; the enemy shall encamp among you, O inhabitants of Zaanan! shall take up a station there, shall find footing among you. Those may well think themselves excused from helping their neighbours who find they have enough to do to help themselves and to hold their own. 3. As for the *inhabitants of Maroth* (which, some think, is put for Ramoth, others that it signifies the rough places), they waited carefully for good, and were grieved for the want of it, but were disappointed; for *evil came from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem*, when the Assyrian army besieged it, v. 12. The inhabitants of Maroth might well overlook their own particular grievances when they saw the holy city itself in danger, and might well overlook the Assyrian, that was the instrument, when they saw the evil coming from the Lord. 4. Lachish was a city of Judah, which Sennacherib laid siege to, Isa. xxxvi. 1, 2. The inhabitants of that city are called to *bind the chariot to the swift beast*, to prepare for a speedy flight, as having no other way left to secure themselves and their families; or it is spoken ironically: "You have had your chariots and your swift beasts, but where are they now?" God's quarrel with Lachish is that she is *the beginning of sin*, probably the sin of idolatry, *to the daughter of Zion* (v. 13); they had learned it from the ten tribes, their near neighbours, and so infected the two tribes with it. Note, Those that help to bring sin into a country do but thereby prepare for the throwing of themselves out of it. Those must expect to be first in the punishment who have been ringleaders in sin. *The transgressions of Israel were found in thee*; when they came to be traced up to their original they were found to take rise very much from that city. God knows at whose door to lay the blame of the transgressions of Israel, and whom to find guilty. Lachish, having been so much accessory to the sin of Israel, shall certainly be reckoned with: *Thou shalt give presents to Moresheth-gath*, a city of the Philistines, which perhaps had a dependence upon Gath, that famous Philistine city; thou shalt send to court those of that city to assist thee, but it shall be in vain, for (v. 14) *the houses of Achizib* (a city which joined to Moreshah, or Moresheth, and is mentioned with it, Josh. xv. 44) *shall be a lie to the kings of Israel*; though they depend upon their strength, yet they shall fail them. Here there is an allusion to the name. *Achizib* signifies a lie, and so it shall prove to those that trust in it. 5. Moreshah, that could not, or would not, help Israel, shall herself be made a prey

(v. 15): "*I will bring a heir* (that is, an enemy) that shall take possession of thy lands, with as much assurance as if he were heir at law to them, and *he shall come to Adullam, and to the glory of Israel*, that is, to Jerusalem the head city;" or, "*The glory of Israel shall come to be as Adullam*, a poor despicable place;" or, "*The king of Assyria, whom Israel had gloried in, shall come to Adullam, in laying the country waste*." 6. The whole land of Judah seems to be spoken to (v. 16) and called to weeping and mourning: "*Make thee bald*, by tearing thy hair and shaving thy head; *poll thee for thy delicate children*, that had been tenderly and nicely brought up; *enlarge thy baldness as the eagle* when she casts her feathers and is all over bald; *for they have gone into captivity from thee*, and are not likely to return; and their captivity will be the more grievous to them because they have been brought up delicately and have not been inured to hardship." Or this is directed particularly to the inhabitants of *Mareshah*, as v. 15. That was the prophet's own city, and yet he denounces the judgments of God against it; for it shall be an aggravation of its sin that it had such a prophet, and knew not the day of its visitation. Its being thus privileged, since it improved not the privilege, shall not procure favour for it either with God or with his prophet.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. The sins with which the people of Israel are charged—covetousness and oppression, fraudulent and violent practices (ver. 1, 2), dealing barbarously, even with women and children, and other harmless people, ver. 8, 9. Opposition of God's prophets and silencing them (ver. 6, 7), and delighting in false prophets, ver. 11. II. The judgments with which they are threatened for those sins, that they should be humbled, and impoverished (ver. 3—5), and banished, ver. 10. III. Gracious promises of comfort, reserved for the good people among them, in the Messiah, ver. 12, 13. And this is the sum and scope of most of the chapters of this and other prophecies.

**W**OE to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. 2 And they covet fields, and take *them* by violence; and houses, and take *them* away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. 3 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks; neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil. 4 In that day shall *one* take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We be utterly spoiled: he hath changed the portion of my people: how hath he removed *it* from me! turning away he hath divided our fields. 5 Therefore thou shalt



have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the LORD.

Here is, I. The injustice of man contriving the evil of sin, v. 1, 2. God was coming forth against this people to destroy them, and here he shows what was the ground of his controversy with them; it is that which is often mentioned as a sin that hastens the ruin of nations and families as much as any, the sin of oppression. Let us see the steps of it. 1. They eagerly desire that which is not their own—that is the *root of bitterness*, the root of all evil, v. 2. They *covet fields and houses*, as Ahab did Naboth's vineyard. "Oh that such a one's field and house were mine! It lies convenient for me, and I would manage it better than he does; it is fitter for me than for him." 2. They set their wits on work to invent ways of accomplishing their desire (v. 4); they devise iniquity with a great deal of cursed art and policy; they plot how to do it effectually, and yet so as not to expose themselves, or bring themselves into danger, or under reproach, by it. This is called *working evil*! they are working it in their heads, in their families, and are as intent upon it, and with as much pleasure, as if they were doing it, and are as confident of their success (so wisely do they think they have laid the scheme) as if it were assuredly done. Note, It is bad to do mischief upon a sudden thought, but much worse to devise it, to do it with design and deliberation; when the craft and subtlety of the old serpent appear with his poison and venom, it is wickedness in perfection. They devised it *upon their beds*, when they should have been asleep; care to compass a mischievous design held their eyes waking. *Upon their beds*, where they should have been remembering God, and meditating upon him, where they should have been *communing with their own hearts* and examining them, they were *devising iniquity*. It is of great consequence to improve and employ the hours of our retirement and solitude in a proper manner. 3. They employ their power in executing what they have designed and contrived; they practise the iniquity they have devised, *because it is in the power of their hand*; they find that they can compass it by the help of their wealth, and the authority and interest they have, and that none dare control them, or call them to an account for it; and this, they think, will justify them and bear them out in it. Note, It is the mistake of many to think that as they can do they may do; whereas no power is given for destruction, but all for edification. 4. They are industrious and very expeditious in accomplishing the iniquity they have devised; when they have settled the matter in their thoughts, in their beds, they lose no time, but as soon as the *morning is light* they practise it; they are up early in the prosecution of their de-

signs, and what ill their hand finds to do they do it *with all their might*, which shames our slothfulness and dilatoriness in doing good, and should shame us out of them. In the service of God, and our generation, let it never be said that we left that to be done to-morrow which we could do to-day. 5. They stick at nothing to compass their designs; what they *covet* they *take away*, if they can, and, (1.) They care not what wrong they do, though it be ever so gross and open; they take away men's fields by violence, not only by fraud, and underhand practices, and colour of law, but by force and with a high hand. (2.) They care not to whom they do wrong nor how far the iniquity extends which they devise: They *oppress a man and his house*; they rob and ruin those that have numerous families to maintain, and are not concerned though they send them and their wives and children a begging. They *oppress a man and his heritage*; they take away from men that which they have an unquestionable title to, having received it from their ancestors, and which they have but in trust, to transmit it to their posterity; but those oppressors care not how many they impoverish, so they may but enrich themselves. Note, If covetousness reigns in the heart, commonly all compassion is banished from it; and if any man *love this world*, as the *love of the Father*, so the love of his neighbour is *not in him*.

II. The justice of God contriving the evil of punishment for this sin (v. 3): *Therefore thus saith the Lord*, the righteous God, that judges between man and man, and is an avenger on those that do wrong, *Behold, against this family do I devise an evil*, that is, against the whole kingdom, the *house of Israel*, and particularly those families in it that were cruel and oppressive. They unjustly devise evil against their brethren, and God will justly devise evil against them. Infinite Wisdom will so contrive the punishment of their sin that it shall be very sure, and such as cannot be avoided, very severe, and such as they cannot bear, very signal and remarkable, and such as shall be universally observed to answer to the sin. The more there appears of a wicked wit in the sin the more there shall appear of a holy wisdom and fitness in the punishment; for the Lord will be *known by the judgments he executes*; he will be owned by them. 1. He finds them very secure, and confident that they shall in some way or other escape the judgment, or, though they fall under it, shall soon throw it off and get clear of it, and therefore he tells them, *It is an evil from which they shall not remove their neck*. They were children of *Belial*, that would not endure the easy yoke of God's righteous commands, but *broke those bonds asunder, and cast away those cords from them*; and therefore God will lay upon them the heavy yoke of his righteous judgments, and they shall not be

able to withdraw their necks from that; those that will not be overruled shall be overcome. 2. He finds them very proud and stately, and therefore he tells them that they shall not go haughtily, with *stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go* (Isa. iii. 16); for *this time is evil*, and the events of it are very humbling and mortifying, and such as will bring down the stoutest spirit. 3. He finds them very merry and jovial, and therefore tells them their note shall be changed, their laughter shall be turned into mourning and their joy into heaviness (v. 4): *In that day, when God comes to punish you for your oppression, shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, with a lamentation of lamentations* (so the word is), a most lamentable lamentation, as a song of songs is a most pleasing song. Their enemies shall insult over them, and make a jest of their griefs, for they shall *take up a parable against them*. Their friends shall mourn over them, and lay to heart their calamities, and this shall be the general cry, "*We are utterly spoiled; we are all undone.*" Note, Those that were most haughty and secure in their prosperity are commonly most dejected and most ready to despair in their adversity. 4. He finds them very rich in houses and lands, which they have gained by oppression, and therefore tells them that they shall be stripped of all. (1.) They shall, in their despair, give it all up; they shall say, *We are utterly spoiled; he has changed the portion of my people*, so that it is now no longer theirs, but it is in the possession and occupation of their enemies: *How has he removed it from me!* How suddenly, how powerfully! What is unjustly got by us will not long continue with us; the righteous God will remove it. *Turning away from us in wrath, he has divided our fields*, and given them into the hands of strangers. Woe to those from whom God turns away. The margin reads it, "*Instead of restoring, he has divided our fields*"; instead of putting us again in the possession of our estates, he has confirmed those in the possession of them that have taken them from us." Note, It is just with God that those who have dealt fraudulently and violently with others should themselves be dealt fraudulently and violently with. (2.) God shall ratify what they say in their despair (v. 5); so it shall be: *Thou shalt have none to cast a cord by lot in the congregation of the Lord*, none to divide inheritances, because there shall be no inheritances to divide, no courts to try titles to lands, or determine controversies about them, or cast lots upon them, as in Joshua's time, for all shall be in the enemies' hand. This land, which should be taken from them, they had not only an unquestionable title to, but a very comfortable enjoyment of, for it was *in the congregation of the Lord*, or rather the congregation of the Lord was in

it; it was God's land; it was a holy land, and therefore it was the more grievous to them to be turned out of it. Note, Those are to be considered the sorest calamities which cut us off from the congregation of the Lord, or cut us short in the enjoyment of the privileges of it.

6 Prophecy ye not, *say they to them that prophesy*: they shall not prophesy to them, *that they shall not take shame*. 7 *O thou that art named the house of Jacob*, is the Spirit of the LORD straitened? *are these his doings?* do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly? 8 Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye pull off the robe with the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. 9 The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever. 10 Arise ye, and depart; for this *is not your rest*: because it is polluted, it shall destroy *you*, even with a sore destruction. 11 If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, *saying*, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

Here are two sins charged upon the people of Israel, and judgments denounced against them for each, such judgments as exactly answer the sin—persecuting God's prophets and oppressing God's poor.

1. Persecuting God's prophets, suppressing and silencing them, is a sin that provokes God as much as any thing, for it not only spits in the face of his authority over us, but spurns at the bowels of his mercy to us; for his sending prophets to us is a sure and valuable token of his goodwill. Now observe here,

1. What the obstruction and opposition were which this people gave to God's prophets: They *said to those that prophesy, Prophecy ye not*, as Isa. xxx. 10. They *said to the seers*, "*See not*"; do not trouble us with accounts of what you have seen, nor bring us any such frightful messages." They must either not prophesy at all or prophesy only what is pleasing. The word for *prophesying* here signifies *dropping*, for the words of the prophets dropped from heaven as the dew. Note, Those that hate to be reformed hate to be reproved, and do all they can to silence faithful ministers. Amos was forbidden to prophesy, Amos vii. 10, &c. Therefore persecutors stop their breath, because they have no other way to stop their



mouths; for, if they live, they will preach and torment those that dwell on the earth, as the two witnesses did, Rev. xi. 10. Some read it, *Prophecy not; let these prophecy.* Let not those prophesy that tell us of our faults, and threaten us, but *let those prophecy* that will flatter us in our sins, and cry peace to us. They will not say that they will have no ministers at all, but they will have such as will say just what they would have them and go their way. This they are charged with (v. 11), that when they silenced and frowned upon the true prophets they countenanced and encouraged pretenders, and set them up, and made an interest for them, to confront God's faithful prophets: *If a man walk in the spirit of falsehood*, pretend to have the Spirit of God, while really it is a spirit of error, a spirit of delusion, and he himself knows that he has no commission, no instruction, from God, yet, if he says, *I will prophecy unto thee of wine and strong drink*, if he will but assure them that they shall have wine and strong drink enough, that they need not fear the judgments of war and famine which the other prophets threatened them with, that they shall always have plenty of the delights of sense and never know the want of them, and if he will but tell them that it is lawful for them to drink as much as they please of their wine and strong drink, and they need not scruple being drunk, that they *shall have peace though they go on and add drunkenness to thirst*, such a prophet as this is a man after their own heart, who will tell them that there is neither sin nor danger in the wicked course of life they lead: *He shall even be the prophet of this people*; such a man they would have to be their prophet, that will not only associate with them in their rioting and revelings, but will pretend to consecrate their sensualities by his prophecies and so harden them in their security and sensuality. Note, It is not strange if people that are vicious and debauched covet to have ministers that are altogether such as themselves, for they are willing to believe God is so too, Ps. l. 21. But how are sacred things profaned when they are prostituted to such base purposes, when prophecy itself shall be pressed into the services of a lewd and profane crew! But thus that servant who said, *My Lord delays his coming*, by the spirit of falsehood, *smote his fellow servants and ate and drank with the drunken.*

2. How they are here expostulated with upon this matter (v. 7): "*O thou that art named the house of Jacob*, does it become thee to say and do thus? Wilt thou silence those that prophesy, and forbid them to speak in God's name?" Note, It is an honour and privilege to be *named of the house of Jacob*. Thou art called a Jew, Rom. ii. 17. But, when those who are called by that worthy name degenerate, they commonly prove the worst of men themselves and the worst enemies to God's prophets. The Jews

who were *named of the house of Jacob* were the most violent persecutors of the first preachers of the gospel. Upon this the prophet here argues with these opposers of the word of God, and shows them, (1.) What an affront they hereby put upon God, the God of the holy prophets: "*Is the Lord's Spirit straitened?*" In silencing the Lord's prophets you do what you can to silence his Spirit too; but do you think you can do it? Can you make the Spirit of God your prisoner and your servant? Will you prescribe to him what he shall say, and forbid him to say what is displeasing to you? If you silence the prophets, yet cannot the Spirit of the Lord find out other ways to reach your consciences? Can your unbelief frustrate the divine counsels?" (2.) What a scandal it was to their profession as Jews: "*You are named the house of Jacob*, and this is your honour; but *are these his doings?* Are these the doings of your father Jacob? Do you herein tread in his steps? No; if you were indeed his children you would do his works; but now you seek to kill and silence a man that tells you the truth, in God's name; *this did not Abraham* (John viii. 39, 40); *this did not Jacob*. Or, "*Are these God's doings?* Are these the doings that will please him? Are these the doings of his people? No, you know they are not, however some may be so strangely blinded and bigoted as to kill God's ministers and think that therein they *do him service*," John xvi. 2. (3.) Let them consider how unreasonable and absurd the thing was in itself: *Do not my words do good to those that walk uprightly?* Yes; certainly they do; it is an appeal to the experiences of the generation of the upright: "*Call now if there be any of them that will answer you, and to which of the saints will you turn?*" Turn to which you will, and you will find they all agree in this, that the word of God *does good to those that walk uprightly*; and will you then oppose that which does good, so much good as good preaching does? Herein you wrong God, who owns the words of the prophets to be his words (they are *my words*) and who by them aims and designs to do good to mankind (Ps. cxix. 68); and will you hinder the great benefactor from doing good? Will you put the light of the world under a bushel? You might as well say to the sun, Shine not, as say to the seers, See not. Herein you wrong the souls of men, and deprive them of the benefit designed them by the word of God." Note, Those are enemies not only to God, but to the world, they are enemies to their country, that silence good ministers, and obstruct the means of knowledge and grace; for it is certainly for the public common good of states and kingdoms that religion should be encouraged. God's words do good to those *that walk uprightly*. It is the character of good people that they *walk uprightly* (Ps. xv. 2); and it is their comfort



that the words of God are good and do good to them; they find comfort in them. God's words are good words to good people, and speak comfortably to them. But those that opposed the words of God, and silenced the prophets, pleaded, in justification of themselves, that God's words were unprofitable and unpleasant to them, and did them no good, nor prophesied any good concerning them, but evil, as Ahab complained of Micaiah, in answer to which the prophet here tells them that it was their own fault; they might thank themselves. They might find it of good use to them if they were but disposed to make a good use of it; if they would but walk uprightly, as they should, and so qualify themselves for comfort, the word of God would speak comfortably to them. *Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise for the same.*

3. What they are threatened with for this sin; God also will choose their delusions, and, (1.) They shall be deprived of the benefit of a faithful ministry. Since they say, *Prophecy not*, God will take them at their word, and *they shall not prophesy to them*; their sin shall be their punishment. If men will silence God's ministers, it is just with God to silence them, as he did Ezekiel, and to say, *They shall no more be reprovers and monitors to them.* Let the physician no longer attend the patient that will not be healed, for he will not be ruled. *They shall not prophesy to them*, and then they will not take shame. As it is the work of magistrates, so is it also of ministers, to put men to shame when they do amiss (Judg. xviii. 7), that, being made ashamed of their folly, they may not return again to it; but, when God gives men up to be impudent and shameless in sin, he says to his prophets, *They are joined to idols; let them alone.* (2.) They shall be given up to the blind guidance of an unfaithful ministry. We may understand v. 11 as a threatening: *If a man be found walking in the spirit of falsehood*, having such a lying spirit as was in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, that will strengthen their hands in their wicked ways, he *shall be the prophet of this people*, that is, God will leave them to themselves to hearken to such; since they will be deceived, let them be deceived; since they will not admit the *truth in the love of it*, God will send them *strong delusions to believe a lie*, 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. They shall have prophets that will prophesy to them for *wine and strong drink* (so some read it), that will give you a cast of their office to your mind for a bottle of wine or a flagon of ale, will soothe sinners in their sins if they will but feed them with the gratifications of their lusts; to have such prophets, and to be ridden by them, is as sad a judgment as any people can be under and as bad a preface of ruin approaching as it is to a particular person to be under the influence of a debauched conscience.

II. Oppressing God's poor is another sin they are charged with, as before (v. 1, 2), for it is a sin doubly hateful and provoking to God. Observe,

1. How the sin is described, v. 8, 9. When they contemned God's prophets and opposed them they broke out into all other wickedness; what bonds will hold those that have no reverence for God's word? Those who formerly rose up against the enemies of the nation, in defence of their country, and therein behaved themselves bravely, now of late *rose up as enemies of the nation*, and, instead of defending it, destroyed it, and did it more mischief (as usually such vipers in the bowels of a state do) than a foreign enemy could do. They made a prey of men, women, and children, (1.) Of men, that were travelling on the way, that *pass by securely as men averse from war*, that were far from any bad designs, but went peaceably about their lawful occasions; those they set upon, as if they had been dangerous obnoxious people, and *pulled off the robe with the garment from them*, that is, they stripped them both of the upper and the inner garment, took away *their cloak*, and would have *their coat also*; thus barbarously did they use those that were *quiet in the land*, who, being harmless, were fearless, and so the more easily made a prey of. (2.) Of women, whose sex should have been their protection (v. 9): *The women of my people have you cast out from their pleasant houses. They devoured widows' houses* (Matt. xxiii. 14), and so turned them out of the possession of them, because they were pleasant houses, and such as they had a mind for. It was inhuman to deal thus barbarously with women; but that which especially aggravated it was that they were the women of *God's people*, whom they knew to be under his protection. (3.) Of children, whose age entitles them to a tender usage: *From their children have you taken away my glory for ever.* It was the glory of the Israelites' children that they were free, but they enslaved them—that they were born in God's house, and had a right to the privileges of it, but they sold them to strangers, sent them into idolatrous countries, where they were deprived for ever of that glory; at least the oppressors designed their captivity should be perpetual. Note, The righteous God will certainly reckon for injuries done to the widows and fatherless, who, being helpless and friendless, cannot otherwise expect to be righted.

2. What the sentence is that is passed upon them for it (v. 10): *"Arise ye, and depart; prepare to quit this land, for you shall be forced out of it, as you have forced the women and children of my people out of their possessions; it is not, it shall not, be your rest, as it was intended that Canaan should be, Ps. xcv. 11. You shall have neither contentment nor continuance in it, because it is polluted by your wickedness."* Sin is defiling



to a land, and sinners cannot expect to rest in a land which they have polluted, but it will spew them out, as this land spewed out the Canaanites of old when they had polluted it with their abominations, Lev. xviii. 27, 28. "Nay, you shall not only be obliged to depart out of this land, but *it shall destroy you even with a sore destruction*; you shall either be turned out of it or (which is all one) you shall be ruined in it." We may apply this to our state in this present world; it is polluted; there is a great deal of *corruption in the world, through lust*, and therefore we should *arise, and depart out of it*, keep at a distance from the corruption that is in it, and *keep ourselves unspotted* from it. It is *not our rest*; it was never intended to be so; it was designed for our passage, but not for our portion—our inn, but not our home. Here *we have no continuing city*; let us therefore *arise and depart*; let us sit loose to it and live above it, and think of leaving it and seek a continuing city above.

12 I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of *the multitude of men*. 13 The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the LORD on the head of them.

After threatenings of wrath, the chapter here concludes, as is usual in the prophets, with promises of mercy, which were in part fulfilled when the Jews returned out of Babylon, and had their full accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah. Their grievances shall be all redressed. 1. Whereas they were dispersed, they shall be brought together again, and shall jointly receive the tokens of God's favour to them, and shall have communion with each other and comfort in each other (v. 12): "*I will surely assemble, O Jacob! all of thee*, all that belong to thee, all that are *named of the house of Jacob* (v. 7) that are now expelled your country, v. 10. I will bring you together again, and not one of you shall be lost, not one of you shall be missing. *I will surely gather the remnant of Israel*, that remnant that is designed and reserved for salvation; they shall be brought to incorporate in one body. *I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah*." Sheep are inoffensive and sociable creatures; they shall be *as the flock in the midst of their fold*, their own fold, where they are safe under the shepherd's eye and

care; and *they shall make great noise* (as numerous flocks and herds do, with their bleating and loving) *by reason of the multitude of men* (for the sheep are men, as the prophet explains this comparison, Ezek. xxxiv. 31), not by reason of their strifes and contentions, but by reason of their great numbers. This was accomplished when Christ by his gospel gathered together in one *all the children of God that were scattered abroad*, and united both Jews and Gentiles in one fold, and under one Shepherd, when all the complaint was that the *place was too strait* for them—that *was the noise, by reason of their multitude* (Isa. xlix. 19, 20), when there were some added to the church from all parts of the world, and all men were drawn to Christ by the attractive power of his cross, which shall be done yet more and more, and perfectly done, when he shall send forth his angels to *gather in his elect from the four winds*. 2. Whereas God had seemed to desert them, and cast them off, now he will own them, and head them, and help them through all the difficulties that are in the way of their return and deliverance (v. 13): *The breaker has come up before them*, to break down all opposition, and clear the road for them; and under his guidance *they have broken up, and have passed through the gate*, the door of escape out of their captivity, and have *gone out by it* with courage and resolution, having Omnipotence for their van-guard. *Their King shall pass before them*, to head them in the way, even Jehovah (he is their king) *on the head of them*, as he was on the head of the armies of Israel when they followed the pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness and when he appeared to Joshua as *captain of the Lord's host*. Christ is the church's King; he is Jehovah; he heads them, passes before them, brings them out of the land of their captivity, brings them into the land of their rest. He is the *breaker*, that broke in upon the powers of darkness and broke through them, that rent the veil, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. The learned bishop Pearson applies it to the resurrection of Christ, by which he obtained the power and became the pattern of our resurrection. *The breaker has gone up before us* out of the grave, and has carried away its gates, as Samson did Gaza's, bar and all, and by that breach we go out. The learned Dr. Pocock mentions, as the sense which some of the ancient Jews give of it, that the breaker is Elias, and their King the Messiah, the Son of David; and he thinks we may apply it to Christ and his forerunner John the Baptist. John was the breaker; he broke the ice, prepared the way of the Lord by the baptism of repentance; in him the gospel began; from his time *the kingdom of heaven suffered violence*; and so the Christian church is introduced, with Messiah the Prince before it, on the head of it, going forth conquering and to conquer.

## CHAP. III.

What the apostle says of another of the prophets is true of this, who was also his contemporary—" *His face is very bold,*" Rom. i. 20. So, in this chapter, Micah is very bold in reproving and threatening the great men that were the ringleaders in sin; and he gives the reason (ver. 8) why he was so bold, because he had commission and instruction from God to say what he said, and was carried out in it by a higher spirit and power than his own. Magistracy and ministry are two great ordinances of God, for good to his church, but these were both corrupted and the intentions of them perverted; and upon those that abused them, and so abused the church with them, the prophet is very severe, and justly so. 1. He gives them their lesson severally, reproving and threatening princes (ver. 1-4) and false and flattering prophets, ver. 5-7. 11. He gives them their lesson jointly, putting them together, as acting in conjunction for the ruin of the kingdom, which they should see the ruins of, ver. 9-12.

AND I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; *Is it not for you to know judgment?* 2 Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; 3 Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron. 4 Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings. 5 Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him: 6 Therefore night *shall be* unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. 7 Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for *there is* no answer of God.

Princes and prophets, when they faithfully discharge the duty of their office, are to be highly honoured above other men; but when they betray their trust, and act contrary to it, they should hear of their faults as well as others, and shall be made to know that there is a God above them, to whom they are accountable; at his bar the prophet here, in his name, arraigns them.

I. Let the princes hear their charge and their doom. The *heads of Jacob*, and the *princes of the house of Israel*, are called upon to hear what the prophet has to say to them, v. 1. The word of God has reproofs for the greatest of men, which the ministers of that

word ought to apply as there is occasion. The prophet here has comfort in the reflection upon it, that, whatever the success was, he had faithfully discharged his trust: *And I said, Hear, O princes!* He had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had not shrunk from his duty for fear of the face of men. He tells them,

1. What was expected from them: *Is it not for you to know judgment?* He means to do judgment, for otherwise the knowledge of it is of no avail. "Is it not your business to administer justice impartially, and not to *know faces*" (as the Hebrew phrase for partiality and respect of persons is), "but to *know judgment*, and the merits of every cause?" Or it may be taken for granted that the heads and rulers are well acquainted with the rules of justice, whatever others are; for they have those means of knowledge, and have not those excuses for ignorance, which some others have, that are poor and foolish (Jer. v. 4); and, if so, their transgression of the laws of justice is the more provoking to God, for they sin against knowledge. "Is it not for you to know judgment? Yes, it is; therefore stand still, and hear your own judgment, and judge if it be not right, whether any thing can be objected against it."

2. How wretchedly they had transgressed the rules of judgment, though they knew what they were. Their principle and disposition are bad: They *hate the good and love the evil*; they hate good in others, and hate it should have any influence on themselves; they hate to do good, hate to have any good done, and hate those that are good and do good; and they *love the evil*, delight in mischief and in those that do mischief. This being their principle, their practice is according to it; they are very cruel and severe towards those that are under their power, and whoever lies at their mercy will find that they have none. They barbarously devour those whom they should protect, and, as unfaithful shepherds, fleece the flock they should feed; nay, instead of feeding it, they feed upon it, Ezek. xxxiv. 2. It is fit indeed that he who feeds a flock should *eat of the milk of the flock* (1 Cor. ix. 7), but that will not content them: They *eat the flesh of my people*. It is fit that they should be clothed with the wool, but that will not serve: They *flay the skin from off them*, v. 3. By imposing heavier taxes upon them than they can bear, and exacting them with rigour, by mulcts, and fines, and corporal punishments, for pretended crimes, they ruined the estates and families of their subjects, took away from some their lives, from others their livelihoods, and were to their subjects as beasts of prey, rather than shepherds. "They *break their bones* to come at the marrow, and *chop the flesh in pieces as for the pot.*" This intimates that they were, (1.) Very ravenous and greedy for



themselves, indulging themselves in luxury and sensuality. (2.) Very barbarous and cruel to those that were under them, not caring whom they beggared, so they could but enrich themselves; such evil is the love of money the root of.

3. How they might expect that God should deal with them, since they had been thus cruel to his subjects. The rule is fixed, Those shall have judgment without mercy that have shown no mercy (v. 4): "*They shall cry to the Lord, but he will not hear them, in the day of their distress, as the poor cried to them in the day of their prosperity and they would not hear them.*" There will come a time when the most proud and scornful sinners will *cry to the Lord*, and sue for that mercy which they once neither valued nor copied out. But it will then be in vain; God will even hide his face from them at that time, that time when they need his favour, and see themselves undone without it. At another time they would have turned their back upon him; but at that time he will turn his back upon them, *as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.* Note, Men cannot expect to do ill and fare well, but may expect to find, as Adoni-bezek did, that done to them which they did to others; for *he is righteous who takes vengeance.* With the froward God will show himself froward, and he often gives up cruel and unmerciful men into the hands of those who are cruel and unmerciful to them, as they themselves have formerly been to others. This agrees with Prov. xxi. 13, *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself and shall not be heard;* but the merciful have reason to hope that they shall obtain mercy.

II. Let the prophets hear their charge too, and their doom; they were such as prophesied falsely, and the princes bore rule by their means. Observe,

1. What was their sin. (1.) They made it all their business to flatter and deceive the people: *They make my people err*, lead them into mistakes, both concerning what they should do and concerning what God would do with them. It is ill with a people when their leaders cause them to err, and those draw them out of the way that should guide them and go before them in it. "They make them to err by crying peace, by telling them that they do well, and that all shall be well with them; whereas they are in the paths of sin, and within a step of ruin. They *cry peace*, but they *bite with their teeth*," which perhaps is meant of their biting their own lips, as we are apt to do when we would suppress something which we are ready to speak. When they cried *peace* their own hearts gave them the lie, and they were just ready to eat their own words and to contradict themselves, but they bit with their teeth, and kept it in. They were not blind leaders of the blind, for they saw the ditch

before them, and yet led their followers into it. (2.) They made it all their aim to glut themselves, and serve their own belly, as the seducers in St. Paul's time (Rom. xvi. 18), for *their god is their belly*, Phil. iii. 19. *They bite with their teeth, and cry peace*: that is, they will flatter and compliment those that will feed them with good bits, will give them something to eat; but as for those that *put not into their mouths*, that are not continually cramming them, they look upon them as their enemies; to them they do not *cry peace*, as they do to those whom they look upon as their benefactors, but they *even prepare war against them*; against them they denounce the judgments of God; they preach either comfort or terror to men, not according as they are to God, but as they are to them, as the crafty priests of the church of Rome, in some places, make their image either to smile or frown upon the offerer according as his offering is. Justly is it insisted on as a necessary qualification of a minister (1 Tim. iii. 3, and again Tit. i. 7) that he be not *greedy of filthy lucre*.

2. What is the sentence passed upon them for this sin, v. 6, 7. It is threatened, (1.) That they shall be involved in troubles and miseries with those to whom they had cried peace: *Night shall be upon them*, a dark cold night of calamity, such as they, in their flattery, led the people to hope would never come. *It shall be dark unto you*, darker to you than to others; *the sun shall go down over the prophets*, shall go down at noon; all comfort shall depart from them, and they shall be deprived of all hope of it. The *day shall be dark over them*, in which they promised themselves light. Nor shall they be surrounded with outward troubles only, but their mind shall be full of confusion, and they shall be brought to their wits' end; their heads shall be clouded, and their own thoughts shall trouble them; and that is trouble enough. They kept others in the dark, and now God will bring them into the dark. (2.) That thereby they shall be silenced, and all their pretensions to prophecy for ever shamed. They never had any true vision; and now, the event disproving their predictions of peace, it shall be made to appear that they never had any, that there never was an answer of God to them, but it was all a sham, and they were cheats and impostors. Their reputation being thus quite sunk, their confidence would of course fail them. And, their spirits being ruffled and confused, their invention would fail them too; and by reason of this darkness, both without and within too, *they shall not divine*, they shall not have so much as a counterfeit vision to produce, they shall be *ashamed*, and *confounded*, and *cover their lips*, as men that are quite baffled and have nothing to say for themselves. Note, Those who deceive others are but preparing confusion for their own faces.



8 But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. 9 Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. 10 They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. 11 The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, *Is not the Lord among us?* none evil can come upon us. 12 Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

Here, I. The prophet experiences a divine power going along with him in his work, and he makes a solemn profession and protestation of it, as that which would justify him, and bear him out, in his plain dealing with the princes and rulers. He would not, he durst not, make thus bold with the great men, but that he was carried out to do it by a prophetic impulse and impression. It was not he that said it, but God by him, and he could not but speak the word that God put into his mouth. It comes in likewise by way of opposition to the false prophets, who were full of shame when they lived to see themselves proved liars, and who never had courage to deal faithfully with the people, but flattered them in their sins; they were *sensual, not having the Spirit*, but truly (says Micah) *I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*, v. 8. Having in himself an assurance of the truth of what he said, he said it with assurance. Compare him with those false prophets, and you will say, There is no comparison between them. *What is the chaff to the wheat?* Jer. xxiii. 28. What is painted fire to real fire? Observe here, 1. What the qualifications were with which this prophet was endued: He was *full of power, and of judgment, and of might*; he had an ardent love to God and to the souls of men, a deep concern for his glory and their salvation, and a flaming zeal against sin. He had likewise courage to reprove it and witness against it, not fearing the wrath either of great men or of great multitudes; whatever difficulties or discouragements he met with, they did not deter him nor drive him from his work; *none of these things moved him*. And all this was guided by judgment and discretion; he was a man of wisdom as well as courage; in all his preaching there

was light as well as heat, and a spirit of wisdom as well as of zeal. Thus was this man of God *thoroughly furnished for every good word* he had to say, and every good work he had to do. Those he preached to could not but perceive him to be full both of *power and judgment*, for they found both their *understandings opened* and their *hearts made to burn within them*, with such evidence and demonstration, and with such power, did the word come from him. 2. Whence he had these qualifications, not from and of himself, but he was *full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*. Knowing that it was indeed the *Spirit of the Lord* that was in him, and spoke by him, that it was a divine revelation that he delivered, he spoke it boldly, and as one having authority, *set his face as a flint*, knowing he should be justified and borne out in what he said, Isa. l. 7, 8. Note, Those who act honestly may act boldly; and those who are sure that they have a commission from God need not be afraid of opposition from men. Nay, he had not only a Spirit of prophecy, which was the ground of his boldness, but the Spirit of sanctification endued him with the boldness and wisdom which were requisite for him. It was not in any strength of his own that he was strong; *for who is sufficient for these things?* but in the *Lord, and in the power of his might*; *for from him all our sufficiency is*. Are we full of power at any time, for that which is good? It is purely *by the Spirit of the Lord*, for of ourselves we are weak as water; it is the God of Israel that gives strength and power both to his people and to his ministers. 3. What use he made of these qualifications—this judgment and this power; he *declared to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin*. If transgression be found in Jacob and Israel, they must be told of it, and it is the business of God's prophets to tell them of it, to *cry aloud and not to spare*, Isa. lviii. 1. Those who come to hear the word of God must be willing to be told of their faults, and must not only give their ministers leave to deal plainly and faithfully with them, but take it kindly, and be thankful; but, since few have meekness enough to receive reproof, those have need of a great deal of boldness who are to give reproofs, and must pray for a spirit both of wisdom and might.

II. The prophet exerts this power in dealing with the *heads of the house of Jacob*, both the princes and the prophets, whom he had drawn up a high charge against in the former part of the chapter. He repeats the summons of their attendance and attention (v. 9), the same that we had r. 1, directing himself to the *princes of the house of Israel*, yet he means those of *Judah*; for it appears (Jer. xxvi. 18, 19, where v. 12 is quoted) that this was spoken in Hezekiah's kingdom; but, the ten tribes being gone into captivity, Judah is all that is now left of Jacob and Israel. The prophet speaks re-



spectfully to them (*hear, I pray you*) and gives them their titles of *heads* and *princes*. Ministers must be faithful to great men in reproving them for their sins, but they must not be rude and uncivil to them. Now observe here,

1. The great wickedness that these heads of the house of Jacob were guilty of, *princes, priests, and prophets*; in short, they were covetous, and prostituted their offices to their love of money. (1.) The *princes abhorred all judgment*; they would not be governed by any of its laws, either in their own practice or in passing sentence upon appeals made to them; they *perverted all equity*, and scorned to be under the direction or correction of justice, when it could not be made pliable to their secular interests. When, under pretence of doing right, they did the most palpable wrongs, then they perverted equity, and made it serve a purpose contrary to the intention of the founder of magistracy and fountain of power. It is laid to their charge (v. 10) that *they build up Zion with blood*. "They pretend, in justification of their extortion and oppressions, that they build up Zion and Jerusalem; they add new streets and squares to the holy cities, and adorn them; they establish and advance the public interests both in church and state, and think that therein they do God and Israel good service. But it is *with blood* and *with iniquity*, and therefore it cannot prosper; nor will their intentions of good to the city of God justify their contradictions to the law of God." Those mistake who think that a burning flaming zeal for holy church, and the propagating of the faith, will serve to consecrate robberies and murders, massacres and depredations; no, Zion's walls owe those no thanks that build them up with blood and iniquity. The sin of man works not the righteousness of God. "The office of the princes is to judge upon appeals made to them; but *they judge for reward* (v. 11); they give judgment on the side of those that give the bribe; the most righteous cause shall not be carried without a fee, and for a fee the most unrighteous cause shall be carried." Miserable is the people's case when the judge's enquiry upon a cause is not, "What is to be done in it?" but, "What is to be got by it?" (2.) The priests' work was to teach the people, and for that the law had provided them a very honourable comfortable maintenance; but that will not content them, they *teach for hire* over and above, and will be hired to teach any thing, as an oracle of God, which they know will please and gain them an interest. (3.) The prophets, it should seem, had honorary fees given them by way of gratuity (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8); but these prophets governed themselves in their prophesying by the prospect of temporal advantage and that was the main thing they had in their eye: They *divine for money*. Their tongues were mercenary; they would either prophesy or

let it alone, according as they found it most for their advantage; and a man might have what oracle he would from them if he would but pay them for it. Thus they were fit successors of Balaam, who *loved the wages of unrighteousness*. Note, Though that which is wicked can never be consecrated by a zeal for the church, yet that which is sacred may be, and often is, desecrated, by the love of the world. When men do that which in itself is good, but do it for filthy lucre, it loses its excellency, and becomes an abomination both to God and man.

2. Their vain presumption and carnal confidence, notwithstanding: They *lean upon the Lord*, and because they are, in profession, his people, they think there is neither harm nor danger in these their wicked practices. Faith builds upon the Lord, rests in him, and relies upon him, as the soul's foundation; presumption only *leans upon the Lord* as a prop, makes use of him to serve a turn, while still the world is the foundation that is built upon. They speak with a great deal of confidence, (1.) Of their honour: "*Is not the Lord among us?*" Have we not the tokens of his presence with us, his temple, his ark, his lively oracles?" They are *haughty because of the holy mountain* and its dignities (Zeph. iii. 11), as if their church-privileges would palliate the worst of practices, or as if God's presence with them were intended to make the priests and people rich with the sale of their performances. It was true that the Lord was among them by his ordinances, and this puffed them up with pride; but, if they imagined that he was among them by his favour and love, they were mistaken: but it is a cheat the children of men often put upon themselves to think they have God with them, when they have by their sin provoked him to depart from them. (2.) They are confident of their own safety. *No evil can come upon us*. Many are rocked asleep in a fatal security by their church-privileges, as if those would protect them in sin, and shelter them from punishment, which are really, and will be, the greatest aggravations both of their sin and of their punishment. If men's having the Lord among them will not restrain them from doing evil, it can never secure them from suffering evil for so doing; and it is very absurd for sinners to think that their impudence will be their impunity.

3. The doom passed upon them for their real wickedness, notwithstanding their imaginary protection (v. 12): *Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field*. This is that passage which is quoted as a bold word spoken by Micah (Jer. xxvi. 18), which yet Hezekiah and his princes took well, though in another reign it might have gone near to cost him his head; nay, they repented and reformed, and so the execution of this threatening was prevented, and did not come in those days. (1.) It is the ruin of holy places that is here foretold, places that had

been highly honoured with the tokens of God's presence and the performances of his worship; it is Zion that shall be ploughed as a field, the building burnt to the ground and levelled with it. Some observe that this was literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, when the ground on which the city stood was ploughed up in token of its utter desolation, and that no city should be built upon that ground without the emperor's leave. Even *Jerusalem*, the holy city, shall *become heaps of ruins*, and the *mountain of the house*, on which the temple is built, shall be overgrown with briars and thorns, *as the high places of the forest*. If sacred places be polluted by sin, they must expect to be wasted and ruined by the judgments of God. (2.) It is the wickedness of those who preside in them that brings the ruin: "It is for your sake that *Zion shall be ploughed as a field*; you pretend to build up Zion, but, doing it by blood and iniquity, you pull it down." Note, The sin of priests and princes is often the ruin of states and churches. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi—The kings act foolishly and the people suffer for it.*

## CHAP. IV.

Comparing this chapter with the close of the foregoing chapter, the comfortable promises here with the terrible threatenings there, we may, with the apostle, "behold the goodness and severity of God," (Rom. xi. 22), towards the Jewish church which fell, severity when Zion was ploughed as a field, but towards the Christian church, which was built upon the ruins of it, goodness, great goodness; for it is here promised, I. That it shall be advanced and enlarged by the accession of the nations to it, ver. 1, 2. II. That it shall be protected in tranquillity and peace, ver. 3, 4. III. That it shall be kept close, and constant, and faithful to God, ver. 5. IV. That, under Christ's government, all its grievances shall be redressed, ver. 6, 7. V. That it shall have an ample and flourishing dominion, ver. 8. VI. That its troubles shall be brought to a happy issue at length, ver. 9, 10. VII. That its enemies shall be disquieted, nay, that they shall be destroyed in and by their attempts against it, ver. 11—13.

**B**UT in the last days it shall come to pass, *that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.* 2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 4 But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none

shall make *them* afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken *it*. 5 For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. 6 In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; 7 And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

It is a very comfortable *but* with which this chapter begins, and very reviving to those who lay the interests of God's church near their heart and are concerned for the welfare of it. When we sometimes see the corruptions of the church, especially of church-rulers, princes, priests, and prophets, seeking their own things and not the things of God, and when we soon after see the desolations of the church, *Zion* for their sakes *ploughed as a field*, we are ready to fear that it will one day perish between both, that the name of Israel shall be no more in remembrance; we are ready to give up all for gone, and to conclude the church will have neither root nor branch upon earth. But let not our faith fail in this matter; out of the ashes of the church another phoenix shall arise. In the last words of the foregoing chapter we left *the mountain of the house* as desolate and waste as the *high places of the forest*; and is it possible that such a wilderness should ever become a fruitful field again? Yes, the first words of this chapter bring in *the mountain of the Lord's house* as much dignified by being frequented as ever it had been disgraced by being deserted. Though Zion be ploughed as a field, yet God has not *cast off his people*, but by the fall of the Jews salvation has come to the Gentiles, so that it proves to be the riches of the world, Rom. xi. 11, 12. This is the mystery which God by the prophet here shows us, and he says the very same in the first three verses of this chapter which another prophet said by the word of the Lord at the same time (Isa. ii. 2—4), that *out of the mouth of these two witnesses* these promises might be established; and very precious promises they are, relating to the gospel-church, which have been in part accomplished, and will be yet more and more, for he is faithful that has promised.

I. That there shall be a church for God set up in the world, after the defection and destruction of the Jewish church, and this in the last days; that is, as some of the rabbins themselves acknowledge, *in the days of the Messiah*. The people of God shall be incor-



porated by a new charter, a new spiritual way of worship shall be enacted, and a new institution of offices to attend it; better privileges shall be granted by this new charter, and better provision made for enlarging and establishing the kingdom of God among men than had been made by the Old-Testament constitution: *The mountain of the house of the Lord* shall again appear firm ground for God's faithful worshippers to stand, and go, and build upon, in their attendance on him, v. 1. And it shall be a centre of unity to them; a church shall be set up in the world, to which the Lord will be daily *adding such as shall be saved*.

II. That this church shall be firmly founded and well-built: *It shall be established in the top of the mountains*; Christ himself will build it upon a rock; it shall be an impregnable fort upon an immovable foundation, so that the gates of hell shall neither overthrow the one nor undermine the other (Matt. xvi. 18); its foundations are still in the *holy mountains* (Ps. lxxvii. 1), the *everlasting mountains*, which cannot, which shall not, be removed. It shall be established, not as the temple, upon one mountain, but upon many; for the foundations of the church, as they are sure, so they are large.

III. That it shall be highly advanced, and become eminent and conspicuous: *It shall be exalted above the hills*, observed with wonder for its growing greatness from small beginnings. The kingdom of Christ shall shine with greater lustre than ever any of the kingdoms of the earth did. It shall be as *a city on a hill, which cannot be hid*, Matt. v. 14. The glory of this latter house is greater than that of the former, Hag. ii. 9. See 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, &c.

IV. That there shall be a great accession of converts to it and succession of converts in it. *People shall flow unto it* as the waters of a river are continually flowing; there shall be a constant stream of believers flowing in from all parts into the church, as the people of the Jews flowed into the temple, while it was standing, to worship there. Then many tribes came to the mountain of the house, to enquire of God's temple; but in gospel-times many nations shall flow into the church, shall *fly like a cloud and as the doves to their windows*. Ministers shall be sent forth to *disciple all nations*, and they shall not labour in vain; for, multitudes being wrought upon to believe the gospel and embrace the Christian religion, they shall excite and encourage one another, and shall say, "*Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord* now raised among us, even *to the house of the God of Jacob*, the spiritual temple which we need not travel far to, for it is brought to our doors and set up in the midst of us." Thus shall people be *made willing in the day of his power* (Ps. cx. 3), and shall do what they can to make others willing, as Andrew invited Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to be acquainted

with Christ. They shall *call the people to the mountain* (Deut. xxxiii. 19), for there is in Christ enough for all, enough for each. Now observe what it is, 1. Which these converts expect to find in *the house of the God of Jacob*. They come thither for instruction: "*He will teach us of his ways*, what is the way in which he would have us to walk with him and in which we may depend upon him to meet us graciously." Note, Where we come to worship God we come to be taught of him. 2. Which they engage to do when they are thus taught of God: *We will walk in his paths*. Note, Those may comfortably expect that God will teach them who are firmly resolved by his grace to do as they are taught.

V. That, in order to this, a new revelation shall be published to the world, on which the church shall be founded, and by which multitudes shall be brought into it: *For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*. The gospel is here called *the word of the Lord*, for the Lord gave the word, and great was the company of those that published it, Ps. lxxviii. 11. It was of a divine original, a divine authority; it began to be spoken by the Lord Christ himself, Heb. ii. 3. And it is *a law*, a law of faith; we are *under the law to Christ*. This was to go forth from Jerusalem, from Zion, the metropolis of the Old-Testament dispensation, where the temple, and altars, and oracles were, and whither the Jews went to worship from all parts; thence the gospel must take rise, to show the connexion between the Old Testament and the New, that the gospel is not set up in opposition to the law, but is an explication and illustration of it, and *a branch growing out of its roots*. It was in Jerusalem that Christ preached and wrought miracles; there he died, rose again, and ascended; there the Spirit was poured out; and those that were to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations were ordered to *begin at Jerusalem*, so that thence flowed the streams that were to water the desert world.

VI. That a convincing power should go along with the gospel of Christ, in all places where it should be preached (v. 3): *He shall judge among many people*. Messiah, the law-giver (v. 2), is here *the judge*, for to him the Father committed all judgment, and for judgment he came into this world; his word, the word of his gospel, that was to go forth from Jerusalem, was the golden sceptre by which he shall rule and judge when he sits as *king on the holy hill of Zion*, Ps. ii. 6. By it he shall *rebuke strong nations afar off*; for the Spirit working with the word shall *reprove the world*, John xvi. 8. It is promised to the Son of David that he shall *judge among the heathen* (Ps. cx. 6), which he does when in the chariot of his everlasting gospel he goes forth, and goes on, *conquering and to conquer*.

VII. That a disposition to mutual peace and love shall be the happy effect of the set-



ting up of the kingdom of the Messiah: *They shall beat their swords into plough-shares*; that is, angry passionate men, that have been fierce and furious, shall be wonderfully sweetened, and made mild and meek, Tit. iii. 2, 3. Those who, before their conversion, did injuries, and would bear none, after their conversion can bear injuries, but will do none. As far as the gospel prevails it makes men peaceable, for such is *the wisdom from above*; it is *gentle and easy to be entreated*; and, if nations were but leavened by it, there would be universal peace. When Christ was born there was universal peace in the Roman empire; those that were first brought into the gospel church were all of *one heart and of one soul* (Acts iv. 32); and it was observed of the primitive Christians how well *they loved one another*. In heaven this will have its full accomplishment. It is promised, 1. That none shall be quarrelsome. The art of war, instead of being improved (which some reckon the glory of a kingdom), shall be forgotten and laid aside as useless. *They shall not learn war any more* as they have done, for they shall have no need to defend themselves nor any inclination to offend their neighbours. *Nation shall no longer lift up sword against nation*; not that the gospel will make men cowards, but it will make men peaceable. 2. That all shall be quiet, both from evil and from the fear of evil (v. 4): *They shall sit safely*, and none shall disturb them; they shall sit securely, and shall not disturb themselves, every man *under his vine and under his fig-tree*, enjoying the fruit of them, and needing no other shelter than the leaves of them. *None shall make them afraid*; not only there shall be nothing that is likely to frighten them, but they shall not be disposed to fear. Under the dominion of Christ, as that of Solomon, there shall be *abundance of peace*. Though his followers have trouble in the world, in him they enjoy great tranquillity. If this seems unlikely, yet we may depend upon it, *for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it*, and no word of his shall fall to the ground; what he has spoken by his word he will do by his providence and grace. He that is the *Lord of hosts* will be the *God of peace*; and those may well be easy whom *the Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, undertakes the protection of.

VIII. That the churches shall be constant in their duty, and so shall make a good use of their tranquillity and shall not provoke the Lord to deprive them of it, v. 5. When *the churches have rest* they shall be edified, and confirmed, and comforted, and shall resolve to be as firm to their God as other nations are to theirs, though they be no gods. Where we find the foregoing promises, Isa. ii. 2, &c. it follows (v. 5), *O house of Jacob! come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord*; and here, *We will walk in the name of the Lord our God*. Note, Peace is a blessing indeed when it strengthens our resolutions to

cleave to the Lord. Observe, 1. How constant other nations were to their gods: *All people will walk every one in the name of his god*, will own their god and cleave to him, will worship their god and serve him, will depend upon him and put confidence in him. Whatever men make a god of they will make use of, and take his name along with them in all their actions and affairs. The mariners, in a storm, *cried every man to his god*, Jonah i. 5. And no instance could be found of a nation's changing its gods, Jer. ii. 11: If the hosts of heaven were their gods, they loved them, and served them, and *walked after them*, Jer. viii. 2. 2. How constant God's people now resolve to be to him: "*We will walk in the name of the Lord our God*", will acknowledge him in all our ways, and govern ourselves by a continual regard to him, doing nothing but what we have warrant from him for, and openly professing our relation to him." Observe, Their resolution is peremptory; it is not a thing that needs be disputed: "*We will walk in the name of the Lord our God*." It is just and reasonable: He is *our God*. And it is a resolution for a perpetuity: "*We will do it for ever and ever*, and will never leave him. He will be ours for ever, and therefore so we will be his, and never repent our choice."

IX. That notwithstanding the dispersions, distress, and infirmities of the church, it shall be formed and established, and made very considerable, v. 6, 7. 1. The state of the church had been low, and weak, and very helpless, in the latter times of the Old Testament, partly through the corruptions of the Jewish nation, and partly through the oppressions under which they groaned. They were like a *flock of sheep* that were *maimed, worried, and scattered*, Ezek. xxxiv. 16; Jer. l. 6, 17. The good people among them, and in other places, that were well inclined, were dispersed, were very infirm, and in a manner lost and cast far off. 2. It is promised that all these grievances shall be redressed and the distemper healed. Christ will come himself (Matt. xv. 24), and send his apostles to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, Matt. x. 6. From among the Jews that halted, or that, for want of strength, could not go upright, God gathered a remnant (v. 7), *that remnant according to the election of grace* which is spoken of in Rom. xi. 7, which embraced the gospel of Christ. And from among the Gentiles that were cast far off (so the Gentiles are described to be, Eph. ii. 13, Acts ii. 39) he raised a strong nation; greater numbers of them were brought into the church than of the Jews, Gal. iv. 27. And such a strong nation the gospel-church is that the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against it. The church of Christ is more numerous than any other nation, and *strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*.

X. That the Messiah shall be the king of



this kingdom, shall protect and govern it, and order all the affairs of it for the best, and this to the end of time. The Lord Jesus shall reign over them in Mount Zion by his word and Spirit in his ordinances, and this henceforth and for ever, for of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.

8 And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. 9 Now why dost thou cry out aloud? *is there* no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. 10 Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go *even* to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. 11 Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. 12 But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. 13 Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thy horns iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

These verses relate to Zion and Jerusalem, here called the *tower of the flock*, or the *tower of Edor*; we read of such a place (Gen. xxxv. 21) near Bethlehem; and some conjecture it is the same place where the shepherds were keeping their flocks when the angels brought them tidings of the birth of Christ, and some think Bethlehem itself is here spoken of, as *ch. v. 2*. Some think it is a tower at that gate of Jerusalem which is called the *sheep-gate* (Neh. iii. 32), and conjecture that through that gate Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem. However, it seems to be put for Jerusalem itself, or for Zion the *tower of David*. All the sheep of Israel flocked thither three times a year; it was the *stronghold* (*Ophel*, which is also a name of a place in Jerusalem, Neh. iii. 27), or castle, of the *daughter of Zion*. Now here,

1. We have a promise of the glories of the spiritual Jerusalem, the gospel-church, which

is the tower of the flock, that one fold in which all the sheep of Christ are protected under one Shepherd: "*Unto thee shall it come, that which thou hast long wanted and wished for, even the first dominion*, a dignity and power equal to that of David and Solomon, by whom Jerusalem was first raised, that kingdom shall again come to the daughter of Jerusalem, which it was deprived of at the captivity. It shall make as great a figure and shine with as much lustre among the nations, and have as much influence upon them, as ever it had; this is the *first or chief dominion*." Now this had by no means its accomplishment in Zerubbabel; his was nothing like the first dominion either in respect of splendour and sovereignty at home or the extent of power abroad; and therefore it must refer to the kingdom of the *Messiah* (and to that the Chaldee-paraphrase refers it) and had its accomplishment when God gave to our Lord Jesus the *throne of his father David* (Luke i. 32), set him king upon the holy hill of Zion, and gave him the heathen for his inheritance (Ps. ii. 6), made him, his *first-born, higher than the kings of the earth*, Ps. lxxix. 27; Dan. vii. 14. *David, in spirit, called him Lord*, and (as Dr. Pocock observes) he witnessed of himself, and his witness was true, that he was greater than Solomon, none of their dominions being like his for extent and duration. The common people welcomed Christ into Jerusalem with *hosannas to the son of David*, to show that it was the *first dominion* that came to the *daughter of Zion*; and the evangelist applies it to the promise of Zion's king coming to her, Matt. xxi. 5; Zech. ix. 9. Some give this sense of the words: To Zion, and Jerusalem that tower of the flock, to the nation of the Jews, came the *first dominion*; that is, there the kingdom of Christ was first set up, the *gospel of the kingdom* was first preached (Luke xxiv. 47), there Christ was first called *king of the Jews*.

II. This is illustrated by a prediction of the calamities of the literal Jerusalem, to which some favour and relief should be granted, as a type and figure of what God would do for the gospel-Jerusalem in the last days, notwithstanding its distresses. We have here,

1. Jerusalem put in pain by the providences of God. "*She cries out aloud*, that all her neighbours may take notice of her griefs, because there is *no king in her*, none of that honour and power she used to have. Instead of ruling the nations, as she did when she *sat a queen*, she is ruled by them, and has become a captive. Her counsellors have perished; she is no longer at her own disposal, but is given up to the will of her enemies, and is governed by their counsellors. *Pangs have taken her*." (1.) She is carried captive to Babylon, and there is in pangs of grief. "*She goes forth out of the city*, and is constrained to dwell in the field, exposed to all

manner of inconvenience; she goes even to *Babylon*, and there wears out *seventy tedious* years in a miserable captivity, all that while in pain, as a woman in travail, waiting to be delivered, and thinking the time very long."

(2.) When she is delivered out of *Babylon*, and redeemed from the hand of her enemies there, yet still she is in pangs of fear; the end of one trouble is but the beginning of another; for now also, when *Jerusalem* is in the rebuilding, many nations are gathered against her, v. 11. They were so in *Ezra's* and *Nehemiah's* time, and did all they could to obstruct the building of the temple and the wall. They were so in the time of the *Maccabees*; they said, *Let her be defiled*; let her be looked upon as a place polluted with sin, and be forsaken and abandoned both of God and man; let her holy places be profaned and all her honours laid in the dust; let our eye look upon *Zion*, and please itself with the sight of its ruins, as it is said of *Edom* (*Obad. 12*, *Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brother*); let our eyes see our desire upon *Zion*, the day we have long wished for. When they hear the enemies thus combine against them, and insult over them, no wonder that they are in pain, and cry aloud. *Without are fightings, within are fears.*

2. *Jerusalem* made easy by the promises of God: "*Why dost thou cry out aloud?* Let thy griefs and fears be silenced; indulge not thyself in them, for, though things are bad with thee, they shall end well; thy pangs are great, but they are like those of a woman in travail (v. 9). that labours to bring forth (v. 10), the issue of which will be good at last." *Jerusalem's* pangs are not as dying agonies, but as *travailing throes*, which after a while will be forgotten, for joy that a child is born into the world. Let the literal *Jerusalem* comfort herself with this, that, whatever straits she may be reduced to, she shall continue until the coming of the *Messiah*, for there his kingdom must be first set up, and she shall not be destroyed while that blessing is in her; and when at length she is ploughed as a field, and become heaps (as is threatened, *ch. iii. 12*), yet her privileges shall be resigned to the spiritual *Jerusalem*, and in that the promises made to her shall be fulfilled. Let *Jerusalem* be easy then, for, (1.) Her captivity in *Babylon* shall have an end, a happy end (v. 10): *There shalt thou be delivered, and the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thy enemies there.* This was done by *Cyrus*, who acted therein as God's servant; and that deliverance was typical of our redemption by *Jesus Christ*, and the release from our spiritual bondage which is proclaimed in the everlasting gospel, that acceptable year of the Lord, in which Christ himself preached liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those that were bound, *Luke iv. 18, 19.* (2.) The designs of her enemies against her afterwards shall be

baffled, nay, they shall turn upon themselves, v. 12, 13. They promise themselves a day of it, but it shall prove *God's day*. They are gathered against *Zion*, to destroy it, but it shall prove to their own destruction, which *Israel* and *Israel's God* shall have the glory of. [1.] Their coming together against *Zion* shall be the occasion of their ruin. They associate themselves, and gird themselves, that they may break *Jerusalem* in pieces, but it will prove that they shall be broken in pieces, *Isa. viii. 9.* They know not the thoughts of the Lord. When they are gathering together, and Providence favours them in it, they little think what God is designing by it, nor do they understand his counsel; they know what they aim at in coming together, but they know not what God aims at in bringing them together; they aim at *Zion's* ruin, but God aims at theirs. Note, When men are made use of as instruments of Providence in accomplishing its purposes it is very common for them to intend one thing and for God to intend quite the contrary. The king of *Assyria* is to be a rod in God's hand for the correction of his people, in order to their reformation; howbeit he means not so, nor does his heart think so, *Isa. x. 7.* And thus it is here; the nations are gathered against *Zion*, as soldiers into the field, but God gathers them as sheaves into the floor, to be beaten to pieces; and they could not have been so easily, so effectually, destroyed, if they had not gathered together against *Zion*. Note, The designs of enemies for the ruin of the church often prove ruining to themselves; and thereby they prepare themselves for destruction and put themselves in the way of it; they are snared in the work of their own hands. [2.] *Zion* shall have the honour of being victorious over them, v. 13. When they are gathered as sheaves into the floor, to be trodden down, as the corn then was by the oxen, then, "*Arise, and thresh, O daughter of Zion!* instead of fearing them, and fleeing from them, boldly set upon them, and take the opportunity Providence favours thee with of trampling upon them. Plead not thy own weakness, and that thou art not a match for so many confederated enemies; God will make thy horn iron, to push them down, and thy hoofs brass, to tread upon them when they are down; and thus thou shalt beat in pieces many people, that have long been beating thee in pieces." Thus, when God pleases, the daughter of *Babylon* is made a threshing-floor (it is time to thresh her, *Jer. li. 33*), and the worm *Jacob* is made a threshing instrument, with which God will thresh the mountains, and make them as chaff, *Isa. xli. 14, 15.* How strangely, how happily, are the tables turned, since *Jacob* was the threshing-floor and *Babylon* the threshing instrument! *Isa. xxi. 10.* Note, When God has conquering work for his people to do he will furnish them with strength and ability for it, will make the horn iron and



the hoofs brass; and, when he does so, they must exert the power he gives them, and execute the commission; even the daughter of Zion must arise, and thresh. [3.] The glory of the victory shall redound to God. Zion shall thresh these sheaves in the floor, but the corn threshed out shall be a meat-offering at God's altar: *I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord* (that is, I will have it consecrated) *and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.* The spoils gained by Zion's victory shall be brought into the sanctuary, and devoted to God, either in part, as those of Midian (Num. xxxi. 28), or in whole, as those of Jericho, Josh. vi. 17. God is Jehovah, the fountain of being; he is the *Lord of the whole earth*, the fountain of power; and therefore he needs not any of our gain or substance, but may challenge and demand it all if he please; and with ourselves we must devote all we have to his honour, to be employed as he directs. Thus far all we have must have *holiness to the Lord* written upon it, all our gain and substance must be *consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth*, Isa. xxiii. 18. And extraordinary successes call for extraordinary acknowledgments, whether they be of spoils in war or gains in trade. It is God that *gives us power to get wealth*, which way soever it is honestly got, and therefore he must be honoured with what we get. Some make all this to point at the defeat of Sennacherib when he besieged Jerusalem, others to the destruction of Babylon, others to the successes of the Maccabees; but the learned Dr. Pocock and others think it had its full accomplishment in the spiritual victories obtained by the gospel of Christ over the powers of darkness that fought against it. The nations thought to ruin Christianity in its infancy, but it was victorious over them; those that persisted in their enmity were *broken to pieces* (Matt. xxi. 44), particularly the Jewish nation; but multitudes by divine grace were gained to the church, and they and their substance were consecrated to the Lord Jesus, *the Lord of the whole earth.*

## CHAP. V.

In this chapter we have, I. A prediction of the troubles and distresses of the Jewish nation, ver. 1. II. A promise of the Messiah, and of his kingdom, to support the people of God in the day of these troubles. 1. Of the birth of the Messiah, ver. 2, 3. 2. Of this advancement, ver. 4. 3. Of his protection of his people, and his victory over his and their enemies, ver. 5, 6. 4. Of the great increase of the church, and the blessings that shall come to the world by it, ver. 7. 5. Of the destruction of the enemies of the church, both those without, that attack it, and those within, that expose it, ver. 8—15.

**N**OW gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. 2 But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that*

*is* to be ruler in Israel; whose doings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting. 3 Therefore will he give them up, until the time *that* she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. 5 And this *man* shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. 6 And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver *us* from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders.

Here, as before, we have,

I. The abasement and distress of Zion, v.

1. The Jewish nation, for many years before the captivity, dwindled, and fell into disgrace: *Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops!* It is either a summons to Zion's enemies, that had troops at their service, to come and do their worst against her (God will suffer them to do it), or a challenge to Zion's friends, that had troops too at command, to come and do their best for her; let them *gather in troops*, yet it shall be to no purpose; for, says the prophet, in the name of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *He has laid siege against us*; the king of Assyria has, the king of Babylon has, and we know not which way to defend ourselves; so that the enemies shall gain their point, and prevail so far as to *smite the judge of Israel*—the king, the chief justice, and the other inferior judges—with *a rod upon the cheek*, in contempt of them and their dignity; having made them prisoners, they shall use them as shamefully as any of the common captives. Complaint had been made of the judges of Israel (ch. iii. 11) that they were corrupt and took bribes, and this disgrace came justly upon them for abusing their power; yet it was a great calamity to Israel to have their judges treated thus ignominiously. Some make this the reason why the troops (that is, the Roman army) shall lay siege to Jerusalem, because the Jews *shall smite the judge of Israel upon the cheek*, because of the indignities they shall do to the Messiah, the Judge of Israel, whom they smote on the cheek, saying, *Prophecy, who*

smote thee. But the former sense seems more probable, and that it is meant of the besieging of Jerusalem, not by the Romans, but the Chaldeans, and was fulfilled in the indignities done to king Zedekiah and the princes of the house of David.

II. The advancement of Zion's King. Having shown how low the house of David should be brought, and how vilely the shield of that mighty family should be cast away, as though it had not been anointed with oil, to encourage the faith of God's people, who might be tempted now to think that his covenant with David and his house was abrogated (according to the psalmist's complaint, Ps. lxxxix. 38, 39), he adds an illustrious prediction of the Messiah and his kingdom, in whom that covenant should be established, and the honours of that house should be revived, advanced, and perpetuated. Now let us see,

1. How the Messiah is here described. It is he that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, from the days of eternity, as the word is. Here we have, (1.) His existence from eternity, as God: *His goings forth*, or *emanations*, as the going forth of the beams from the sun, were, or have been, *of old, from everlasting*, which (says Dr. Pocock) is so signal a description of Christ's eternal generation, or his going forth as the Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, that this prophecy must belong only to him, and could never be verified of any other. It certainly speaks of a going forth that was now past, when the prophet spoke, and cannot but be read, as we read it, *his outgoing have been*; and the putting of both these words together, which severally are used to denote eternity, plainly shows that they must here be taken in the strictest sense (the same with Ps. xc. 2, *From everlasting to everlasting thou art God*), and can be applied to no other than to him who was able to say, *Before Abraham was, I am*, John viii. 58. Dr. Pocock observes that the *going forth* is used (Deut. viii. 3) for a word which *proceeds out of the mouth*, and is therefore very fitly used to signify the eternal generation of him who is called the *Word of God*, that was in the beginning with God, John i. 1, 2. (2.) His office as Mediator; he was to be ruler in Israel, king of his church; he was to reign over the house of Jacob for ever, Luke i. 32, 33. The Jews object that our Lord Jesus could not be the Messiah, for he was so far from being ruler in Israel that Israel ruled over him, and put him to death, and would not have him to reign over them; but he answered that himself when he said, *My kingdom is not of this world*, John xviii. 36. And it is a spiritual Israel that he reigns over, the children of promise, all the followers of believing Abraham and praying Jacob. In the hearts of these he reigns by his Spirit and grace, and in the society of

these by his word and ordinances. And was not he ruler in Israel whom winds and seas obeyed, to whom legions of devils were forced to submit, and who commanded away diseases from the sick and called the dead out of their graves? None but he whose *goings forth were from of old, from everlasting*, was fit to be ruler in Israel, to be head of the church, and head over all things to the church.

2. What is here foretold concerning him.

(1.) That Bethlehem should be the place of his nativity, v. 2. This was the scripture which the scribes went upon when with the greatest assurance they told Herod *where Christ should be born* (Matt. ii. 6), and hence it was universally known among the Jews that *Christ should come out of the town of Bethlehem where David was*, John vii. 42. *Beth-lehem* signifies the house of bread, the fittest place for him to be born in who is the bread of life. And, because it was the city of David, by a special providence it was ordered that he should be born there who was to be the Son of David, and his heir and successor for ever. It is called *Bethlehem-Ephratah*, both names of the same city, as appears Gen. xxxv. 19. It was little among the thousands of Judah, not considerable either for the number of the inhabitants or the figure they made; it had nothing in it worthy to have this honour put upon it; but God in that, as in other instances, chose to exalt those of low degree, Luke i. 52. Christ would give honour to the place of his birth, and not derive honour from it: *Though thou be little*, yet this shall make thee great, and, as St. Matthew reads it, *Thou art not the least among the princes of Judah*, but upon this account art really honourable above any of them. A relation to Christ will magnify those that are little in the world.

(2.) That in the fulness of time he should be born of a woman (v. 3): *Therefore will he give them up*; he will give up his people Israel to distress and trouble, and will defer their salvation, which has been so long promised and expected, *until the time*, the set time, *that she who travails has brought forth*, or (as it should be read) *that she who shall bring forth shall have brought forth*, that the blessed virgin, who was to be the mother of the Messiah, shall have brought him forth at Bethlehem, the place appointed. This Dr. Pocock thinks to be the most genuine sense of the words. Though the out-goings of the Messiah were *from everlasting*, yet the redemption in Jerusalem, the consolation of Israel, must be waited for (Luke ii. 25—35) until the time that *she who should bring forth* (so the virgin Mary is called, as Christ is himself called, *He that shall come*) shall bring forth; and in the mean time *he will give them up*. Divine salvations must be waited for until the time fixed for the bringing of them forth.

(3.) That the remnant of his brethren shall



then return to the children of Israel. The remnant of the Jewish nation shall return to the spirit of the true genuine children of Israel, a people in covenant with God; the hearts of the children shall be turned to the fathers, Mal. iv. 6. Some understand it of all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews; they shall all be incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel; and, as they are all brethren to one another, so he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Heb. ii. 11.

(4.) That he shall be a glorious prince, and his subjects shall be happy under his government (v. 4): *He shall stand and feed*, that is, he shall both teach and rule, and continue to do so, as a good shepherd, with wisdom, and care, and love. So it was foretold. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd*, shall provide green pastures for them, and under-shepherds to lead them into these pastures. He is the *good shepherd* that goes before the sheep, and presides among them. He shall do this, not as an ordinary man, but in the strength of the Lord, as one clothed with a divine power to go through his work, and break through the difficulties in his way, so as not to fail, or be discouraged; he shall do it in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, so as plainly to evidence that God's name was in him (Exod. xxiii. 21) the majesty of his name, for he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes. The prophets prefaced their messages with, *Thus saith the Lord*; but Christ spoke, not as a servant, but as a Son—*Verily, verily, I say unto you*. This was feeding in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. All power was given him in heaven and in earth, a power over all flesh, by virtue of which he still rules in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, a name above every name. Christ's government shall be, [1.] Very happy for his subjects, for they shall abide; they shall be safe and easy, and continue so for ever. *Because he lives, they shall live also*. They shall lie down in the green pastures to which he shall lead them, shall abide in God's tabernacle for ever, Ps. lxi. 4. His church shall abide, and he in it, and with it, always, even to the end of the world. [2.] It shall be very glorious to himself: *Now shall he be great to the ends of the earth*. Now that he stands and feeds his flock, now shall he be great. For Christ reckons it his greatness to do good. Now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, for the uttermost parts of the earth shall be given him for his possession, and the ends of the world shall see his salvation.

(5.) That he shall secure the peace and welfare of his church and people against all the attempts of his and their enemies (v. 5, 6): *This man*, as king and ruler, shall be the peace when the Assyrians shall come into our land. This refers to the deliverance of Hezekiah and his kingdom from the power of Sennacherib, who invaded them, in the

type; but, under the shadow of that, it is a promise of the safety of the gospel-church and of all believers from the designs and attempts of the powers of darkness, Satan and all his instruments, the dragon and his angels, that seek to devour the church of the first-born and all that belong to it. Observe, [1.] The peril and danger which Christ's subjects are supposed to be in. The Assyrian, a potent enemy, comes into their land (v. 5, 6), treads within their borders, nay, prevails so far as to tread in their palaces; it was a time of treading down and of perplexity when Sennacherib made a descent upon Judah, took all the defended cities, and laid siege to Jerusalem, Isa. xxxvi. 1; xxxvii. 3. This represented the gates of hell fighting against the kingdom of Christ, encompassing the camp of the saints and of the holy city, and threatening to bear down all before them. When the terrors of the law set themselves in array against a convinced soul, when the temptations of Satan assault the people of God, and the troubles of the world threaten to rob them of all their comforts, then the Assyrian comes into their land and treads in their palaces. Without are fightings, within are fears. [2.] The protection and defence which his subjects are then sure to be under. First, Christ will himself be their peace. When the Assyrian comes with such a force into a land, can there be any other peace than a tame submission and an unresisted desolation? Yes, even then the church's King will be the conservator of the church's peace, will be for a hiding-place, Isa. xxxii. 1, 2. Christ is our peace as a priest, making atonement for sin, and reconciling us to God; and he is our peace as a king, conquering our enemies and commanding down disquieting fears and passions; he creates the fruit of the lips, peace. Even when the Assyrian comes into the land, when we are in the greatest distress and danger and have received a sentence of death within ourselves, yet this man may be the peace. In me, says Christ, you shall have peace, when in the world you have tribulation; at such a time our souls may dwell at ease in him. Secondly, He will find out proper instruments to be employed for their protection and deliverance, and the defeat of their enemies: *Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men*, that is, a competent number of persons, proper to oppose the enemy, and make head against him, and protect the church of God in peace, men that shall have the care and tenderness of shepherds and the courage and authority of principal men, or princes of men. Seven and eight are a certain number for an uncertain. Note, When God has work to do he will not want fitting instruments to do it with; and when he pleases he can do it by a few; he needs not raise thousands, but seven or eight principal men may serve the turn if God be with them. Magistrates and ministers are shepherds and

principal men, raised in defence of religion's righteous cause against the powers of sin and Satan in the world. *Thirdly*, The opposition given to the church shall be got over, and the opposers brought down. This is represented by the laying of Assyria and Chaldea waste, which two nations were the most formidable enemies to the Israel of God of any, and the destruction of them signified the making of Christ's enemies his footstool: *They shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof*; they shall make inroads upon the land, and put to the sword all that they find in arms. Note, Those that threaten ruin to the church of God hasten ruin to themselves; and their destruction is the church's salvation: *Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian*. When *Satan fell as lightning from heaven* before the preaching of the gospel, and Christ's enemies, that would not have him to reign over them, were *slain before him*, then this was fulfilled.

7 And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. 8 And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. 9 Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off. 10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: 11 And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds: 12 And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: 13 Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. 14 And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities. 15 And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

Glorious things are here spoken of the

*remnant of Jacob*, that remnant which was raised of *her that halted* (ch. iv. 7), and it seems to be that *remnant which the Lord our God shall call* (Joel ii. 32), on whom the Spirit shall be poured out, the remnant that shall be saved, Rom. ix. 27. Note, God's people are but a remnant, a small number in comparison with the many that are left to perish, a *little flock*; but they are the *remnant of Jacob*, a people in covenant with God, and in his favour. Now concerning this remnant it is here promised,

I. That they shall be as a *dew* in the midst of the nations, v. 7. God's church is dispersed all the world over; it is in the midst of many people, as gold in the ore, wheat in the heap. Israel according to the flesh dwelt alone, and was not numbered among the nations; but the spiritual Israel lies scattered in the midst of many people, as the salt of the earth, or as seed sown in the ground, here a grain and there a grain, Hos. ii. 23. Now this remnant shall be as dew from the Lord. 1. They shall be of a heavenly extraction, as dew from the Lord, who is the Father of the rain, and has begotten the drops of the dew, Job xxxviii. 28. They are born from above, and are not of the earth, savouring the things of the earth. 2. They shall be numerous as the drops of dew in a summer's morning. Ps. cx. 3, *Thou hast the dew of thy youth*. 3. They shall be pure and clear, not muddy and corrupt, but crystal drops, as the water of life. 4. They shall be produced silently and without noise, as the dew that distils insensibly, we know not how; such is the way of the Spirit. 5. They shall live in a continual dependence upon God, and be still deriving from him, as the dew, which carries not for man, nor waits for the sons of men; they shall not rely upon human aids and powers, but on divine grace, for they are, and own that they are, no more than what the free grace of God makes them every day. 6. They shall be great blessings to those among whom they live, as the dew and the showers are to the grass, to make it grow without the help of man, or the sons of men. Their doctrine, example, and prayers, shall make them as dew, to soften and moisten others, and make them fruitful. Their speech shall distil as the dew (Deut. xxxii. 2), and all about them shall wait for them as for the rain, Job xxix. 23. The people among whom they live shall be as the grass, which flourishes only by the blessing of God, and not by the art and care of man; they shall be beneficial to those about them by drawing down God's blessings on them, as Jacob on Laban's house, and by cooling and mitigating God's wrath, which otherwise would burn them up, as the dew preserves the grass from being scorched by the sun; so Dr. Pocock; they shall be mild and gentle in their behaviour, like their Master, who comes down like rain upon the new-mown grass, Ps. lxxii. 6.



II. That they shall be *as a lion among the beasts of the forest, that treads down and tears in pieces*, v. 8. As they shall be silent, and gentle, and communicative of all good, to those that receive the truth in the love of it, so they shall be bold as a lion in witnessing against the corruptions of the times and places they live in, and strong as a lion, in the strength of God, to resist and overcome their spiritual enemies. *The weapons of their warfare are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds*, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. They shall have *courage which all their adversaries shall not be able to resist* (Luke xxi. 15), as when the lion tears none can deliver. When infidelity is silenced, and all iniquity made to stop her mouth, when sinners are convinced and converted by the power of the gospel, in the doctrine of its ministers and the conversation of its professors, then the remnant of Jacob is like a lion. This is explained, v. 9, *Thy hand shall be lifted up upon thy adversaries*; the church shall have the upper hand at last of all that oppose her. *Her enemies shall be cut off*: they shall cease to be enemies; their enmity shall be cut off. Christ's arrows of conviction shall be sharp in their hearts, so that they shall fall under him; they shall yield themselves subjects to him (Ps. xlv. 5) and be happily conquered and subdued, Ps. cx. 2.

III. That they shall be brought off from all carnal confidences, which they have relied on, that by the providence of God they shall enjoy such a security that they shall not need them, and by the grace of God they shall be brought to see the folly of them and come off from them. It was the sin of Israel that they furnished themselves extravagantly with *horses and chariots*, and were *soothsayers and idolaters*; see Isa. ii. 6—8. But here it is promised that they shall not regard them any more. The tranquillity of the kingdom of Christ is intended in that promise, which explains this, Zech. ix. 10, *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem*. Note, It is a great mercy to be deprived of those things in which we have reposed a confidence in competition with God, which we have made our arm, and after which we have gone a whoring from God. Let us observe the particulars: —1. They had trusted in chariots and horses, and multiplied them (Ps. xx. 7); but now God will *cut off their horses, and destroy their chariots* (v. 10), as *David houghed the chariot-horses*, 2 Sam. viii. 4. They shall not have them, lest they should be tempted to trust in them. 2. They depended upon their strongholds, and fortified cities, for their security; but God will take care that they be demolished (v. 11): *I will cut off the cities of thy land; I will throw down thy strongholds*. They shall have them for habitations, but not for garrisons, for God will be their only place of defence, their *high tower, and their deliverer*. 3. Many of them

depended much upon the conduct and advice of their conjurors, diviners, and fortune-tellers; and those God will cut off, not only as weak things, and insufficient to relieve them, but as wicked things, and sufficient to ruin them (v. 12): *"I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy hand, that thou shalt no more take hold of them, and stay thyself upon them, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers, for thou shalt be convinced that all their pretensions are a cheat."* The justice of the nation shall cut them off according to law, Lev. xx. 27. The preaching of the gospel brought men off from using curious arts, Acts xix. 19. 4. Many of them had said to the work of their hands, *You are our gods*; but now idolatry shall be abolished and abandoned (v. 13): *"Thy graven images will I cut off, and thy standing images, both those that were movable and those that were fixed; they shall be destroyed by the power of the law of Moses and deserted by the power of the gospel of Christ, so that thou shalt no more worship the work of thy hands, but be ashamed that ever thou hast been so deluded. Among other monuments of idolatry, I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee."* v. 14. These were planted and preserved in honour of their idols, and used in the worship of them; these they were ordered to burn (Deut. xii. 2, 3), and, if they do not, God will, so that they shall not have them to trust to. And *so will I destroy their cities*, meaning the cities that were dedicated to the idols, to some dunghill-deity or other, which they confided in for their protection.

IV. That those who stand it out against the gospel of Christ, and continue in league with their idolatries and witchcrafts, shall fall under the wrath of God, and be consumed by it (v. 15): *I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen* (that is, upon heathenism), *such as they have not heard*; idolatries shall be done away, and idolaters put to shame. *I will execute vengeance upon the heathen who have not heard* (so some read it), or who would not hear and receive the doctrine of Christ. God will give his Son either the hearts or the necks of his enemies, and make them either his friends or his footstool.

#### CHAP. VI.

After the precious promises in the two foregoing chapters, relating to the Messiah's kingdom, the prophet is here directed to set the sins of Israel in order before them, for their conviction and humiliation, as necessary to make way for the comfort of gospel-grace. Christ's forerunner was a reprove, and preached repentance, and so prepared his way. Here, I. God enters an action against his people for their base ingratitude, and the bad returns they had made him for his favours, ver. 1—5. II. He shows the wrong course they took when they were under conviction, and the furious proposals they made, in answer to his charge, and what course they should have taken, ver. 6—8. III. He calls upon them to hear the voice of his judgments, and sets the sins in order before them for which he still proceeded in his controversy with them (ver. 9), their injustice (ver. 10—15), and their idolatry (ver. 16), for both which ruin was coming upon them.

**H**EAR ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills



hear thy voice. 2 Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. 3 O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. 4 For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. 5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

Here, I. The prefaces to the message are very solemn and such as may engage our most serious attention. 1. The people are commanded to give audience: *Hear you now what the Lord says.* What the prophet speaks he speaks from God, and in his name; they are therefore bound to hear it, not as the word of a sinful dying man, but of the holy living God. *Hear now what he saith, for, first or last, he will be heard.* 2. The prophet is commanded to speak in earnest, and to put an emphasis upon what he said: *Arise, contend thou before the mountains, or with the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice,* if it were possible; contend with the mountains and hills of Judea, that is, with the inhabitants of those mountains and hills; and, some think, reference is had to those mountains and hills on which they worshipped idols and which were thus polluted. But it is rather to be taken more generally, as appears by his call, not only to the mountains, but to the *strong foundations of the earth*, pursuant to the instructions given him. This is designed, (1.) To excite the earnestness of the prophet; he must speak as vehemently as if he designed to make even the hills and mountains hear him, must *cry aloud, and not spare*; what he had to say in God's name he must proclaim publicly before the mountains, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to own his message; he must speak as one concerned, as one that desired to speak to the heart, and therefore appeared to speak from the heart. (2.) To expose the stupidity of the people; "*Let the hills hear thy voice,* for this senseless careless people will not hear it, will not heed it. Let the rocks, the *foundations of the earth*, that have no ears, hear, since Israel, that has ears, will not hear." It is an appeal to the mountains and hills; let them bear witness that Israel has fair warning given them, and good counsel, if they would but take it. Thus Isaiah begins with, *Hear, O*

*heavens! and give ear, O earth! Let them judge between God and his vineyard.*

II. The message itself is very affecting. He is to let all the world know that God has a quarrel with his people, good ground for an action against them. Their offences are public, and therefore so are the articles of impeachment exhibited against them. Take notice *the Lord has a controversy with his people and he will plead with Israel*, will plead by his prophets, plead by his providences, to make good his charge. Note, 1. Sin begets a controversy between God and man. The righteous God has an action against every sinner, an action of debt, an action of trespass, an action of slander. 2. If Israel, God's own professing people, provoke him by sin, he will let them know that he has a controversy with them; he sees sin in them, and is displeased with it, nay, their sins are more displeasing to him than the sins of others, as they are a greater grief to his Spirit and dishonour to his name. 3. God will plead with those whom he has a controversy with, will plead with his people Israel, that they may be convinced and that he may be justified. In the close of the foregoing chapter he pleaded with the heathen in anger and fury, to bring them to ruin; but here he pleads with Israel in compassion and tenderness, to bring them to repentance, *Come now, and let us reason together.* God reasons with us, to teach us to reason with ourselves. See the equity of God's cause, it will bear to be pleaded, and sinners themselves will be forced to confess judgment, and to own that *God's ways are equal*, but their *ways are unequal*, Ezek. xviii. 25. Now, (1.) God here challenges them to show what he had done against them which might give them occasion to desert him. They had revolted from God and rebelled against him; but had they any cause to do so? (v. 3): "*O my people! what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee?*" If subjects quit their allegiance to their prince, they will pretend, as the ten tribes did when they revolted from Rehoboam) that his yoke is too heavy for them; but can you pretend any such thing? *What have I done to you that is unjust or unkind? Wherein have I wearied you with the impositions of service or the exactions of tribute? Have I made you to serve with an offering?* Isa. xliii. 23. *What iniquity have your fathers found in me?* Jer. ii. 5. He never deceived us, nor disappointed our expectations from him, never did us wrong, nor put disgrace upon us; why then do we wrong and dishonour him, and frustrate his expectations from us? Here is a challenge to all that ever were in God's service to testify against him if they have found him, in any thing, a hard Master, or if they have found his demands unreasonable. (2.) Since they could not show any thing that he had done against them, he will show



them a great deal that he has done for them, which should have engaged them for ever to his service, *v. 4, 5*. They are here directed, and we in them, to look a great way back in their reviews of the divine favour; let them remember their former days, their first days, when they were formed into a people, and the great things God did for them, [1.] When he brought them out of Egypt, the land of their bondage, *v. 4*. They were content with their slavery, and almost in love with their chains, for the sake of the garlic and onions they had plenty of; but God brought them up, inspired them with an ambition of liberty and animated them with a resolution by a bold effort to shake off their fetters. The Egyptians held them fast, and would not let the people go; but God redeemed them, not by price, but by force, out of the house of servants, or, rather, the house of bondage, for it is the same word that is used in the preface to the ten commandments, which insinuates that the considerations which are arguments for duty, if they be not improved by us, will be improved against us as aggravations of sin. When he brought them out of Egypt into a vast howling wilderness, as he left not himself without witness, so he left not them without guides, for he sent before them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, three prophets (says the Chaldee paraphrase), Moses the great prophet of the Old Testament, Aaron his prophet (*Exod. vii. 1*), and Miriam a prophetess, *Exod. xv. 20*. Note, When we are calling to mind God's former mercies to us we must not forget the mercy of good teachers and governors when we were young; let those be made mention of, to the glory of God, who went before us, saying, *This is the way, walk in it*; it was God that sent them before us, to prepare the way of the Lord and to prepare a people for him. [2.] When he brought them into Canaan. God no less glorified himself, and honoured them, in what he did for them when he brought them into the land of their rest than in what he did for them when he brought them out of the land of their servitude. When Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, were dead, yet they found God the same. Let them remember now what God did for them, *First*, In baffling and defeating the designs of Balak and Balaam against them, which he did by the power he has over the hearts and tongues of men, *v. 5*. Let them remember what Balak the king of Moab consulted, what mischief he devised and designed to do to Israel, when they encamped in the plains of Moab; that which he consulted was to curse Israel, to divide between them and their God, and to disengage him from the protection of them. Among the heathen, when they made war upon any people, they endeavoured by magic charms or otherwise to get from them their tutelar gods, as to rob Troy of its Palladium. Macrobius has a chapter *de ritu*

*evocandi Deos*—concerning the solemnity of calling out the gods. Balak would try this against Israel; but remember what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, how contrary to his own intention and inclination; instead of cursing Israel, he blessed them, to the extreme confusion and vexation of Balak. Let them remember the malice of the heathen against them, and for that reason never learn the way of the heathen, nor associate with them. Let them remember the kindness of their God to them, how he turned the curse into a blessing (because the Lord thy God loved thee, as it is, *Dent. xxiii. 5*), and for that reason never forsake him. Note, The disappointing of the devices of the church's enemies ought always to be remembered to the glory of the church's protector, who can make the answer of the tongue directly to contradict the preparation and consultation of the heart, *Prov. xvi. 1*. Secondly, In bringing them from Shittim, their last lodgment out of Canaan, unto Gilgal, their first lodgment in Canaan. There it was, between Shittim and Gilgal, that, upon the death of Moses, Joshua, a type of Christ, was raised up to put Israel in possession of the land of promise and to fight their battles; there it was that they passed over Jordan through the divided waters, and renewed the covenant of circumcision; these mercies of God to their fathers they must now remember, that they may know the righteousness of the Lord, his righteousness (so the word is), his justice in destroying the Canaanites, his goodness in giving rest to his people Israel, and his faithfulness to his promise made unto the fathers. The remembrance of what God had done to them might convince them of all this, and engage them for ever to his service. Or they may refer to the controversy now pleaded between God and Israel; let them remember God's many favours to them and their fathers, and compare with them their unworthy ungrateful conduct towards him, that they may know the righteousness of the Lord in contending with them, and it may appear that in this controversy he has right on his side; his ways are equal, for he will be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges.

6 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love

mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Here is the proposal for accommodation between God and Israel, the parties that were at variance in the beginning of the chapter. Upon the trial, judgment is given against Israel; they are convicted of injustice and ingratitude towards God, the crimes with which they stood charged. Their guilt is too plain to be denied, too great to be excused, and therefore,

I. They express their desires to be at peace with God upon any terms (v. 6, 7): *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?* Being made sensible of the justice of God's controversy with them, and dreading the consequences of it, they were inquisitive what they might do to be reconciled to God and to make him their friend. They apply to a proper person, with this enquiry, to the prophet, the Lord's messenger, by whose ministry they had been convinced. Who so fit to show them their way as he that had made them sensible of their having missed it? And it is observable that each one speaks for himself: *Wherewith shall I come?* Knowing every one the plague of his own heart, they ask, not, *What shall this man do?* But, *What shall I do?* Note, Deep convictions of guilt and wrath will put men upon careful enquiries after peace and pardon, and then, and not till then, there begins to be some hope of them. They enquire *wherewith they may come before the Lord, and bow themselves before the high God.* They believe there is a God, that he is Jehovah, and that he is the high God, the Most High. Those whose consciences are convinced learn to speak very honourably of God, whom before they spoke slightly of. Now, 1. We know we must come before God; he is the God with whom we have to do; we must come as subjects, to pay our homage to him, as beggars, to ask alms from him, nay, we must come before him, as criminals, to receive our doom from him, must come before him as our Judge. 2. When we come before him we must bow before him; it is our duty to be very humble and reverent in our approaches to him; and, when we come before him, there is no remedy but we must submit; it is to no purpose to contend with him. 3. When we come and bow before him it is our great concern to find favour with him, and to be accepted of him; their enquiry is, *What will the Lord be pleased with?* Note, All that rightly understand their own interest cannot but be solicitous what they must do to please God, to avoid his displeasure and to obtain his good-will. 4. In order to God's being pleased with us, our care must be that the sin by which we have displeased him may be taken away, and an atonement made for it. The enquiry here is, *What shall I give for my transgression, for the sin of my soul?* Note, The transgression we are

guilty of is the sin of our soul, for the soul acts it (without the soul's act it is not sin) and the soul suffers by it; it is the disorder, disease, and defilement of the soul, and threatens to be the death of it: *What shall I give for my transgressions?* What will be accepted as a satisfaction to his justice, a reparation of his honour? And what will avail to shelter me from his wrath? 5. We must therefore ask, *Wherewith may we come before him?* We must not appear before the Lord empty. What shall we bring with us? In what manner must we come? In whose name must we come? We have not that in ourselves which will recommend us to him, but must have it from another. What righteousness then shall we appear before him in?

II. They make proposals, such as they are, in order to it. Their enquiry was very good and right, and what we are all concerned to make, but their proposals betray their ignorance, though they show their zeal; let us examine them:—

1. They bid high. They offer, (1.) That which is very rich and costly—*thousands of rams.* God required one ram for a sin-offering; they proffer flocks of them, their whole stock, will be content to make themselves beggars, so that they may but be at peace with God. They will bring the best they have, the rams, and the most of them, till it comes to thousands. (2.) That which is very dear to them, and which they would be most loth to part with. They could be content to part with their first-born for their transgressions, if that would be accepted as an atonement, and the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. To those that had become vain in their imaginations this seemed a probable expedient of making satisfaction for sin, because our children are pieces of ourselves; and therefore the heathen sacrificed their children, to appease their offended deities. Note, Those that are thoroughly convinced of sin, of the malignity of it, and of their misery and danger by reason of it, would give all the world, if they had it, for peace and pardon.

2. Yet they do not bid right. It is true some of these things were instituted by the ceremonial law, as the bringing of burnt-offerings to God's altar, and calves of a year old, rams for sin-offerings, and oil for the meat-offerings; but these alone would not recommend them to God. God had often declared that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams, that sacrifice and offering he would not; the legal sacrifices had their virtue and value from the institution, and the reference they had to Christ the great propitiation; but otherwise, of themselves, it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin. And as to the other things here mentioned, (1.) Some of them are impracticable things, as rivers of oil, which nature has not provided to feed men's luxury, but rivers of water to



supply men's necessity. All the proposals of peace but those that are according to the gospel are absurd. One stream of the blood of Christ is worth ten thousand rivers of oil.

(2.) Some of them are wicked things, as to give our *first-born* and the *fruit of our body* to death, which would but add to the transgression and the *sin of the soul*. He that hates robbery for burnt-offerings much more hates murder, such murder. What right have we to our *first-born* and the *fruit of our body*? Do they not belong to God? Are they not his already, and born to him? Are they not sinners by nature, and their lives forfeited upon their own account? How then can they be a ransom for ours? (3.) They are all external things, parts of that bodily exercise which profiteth little, and which could not *make the comers thereunto perfect*. (4.) They are all insignificant, and insufficient to attain the end proposed; they could not answer the demands of divine justice, nor satisfy the wrong done to God in his honour by sin, nor would they serve in lieu of the sanctification of the heart and the reformation of the life. Men will part with any thing rather than their sins, but they part with nothing to God's acceptance unless they part with them.

III. God tells them plainly what he demands, and insists upon, from those that would be accepted of him, *v. 8*. Let their money perish with them that think the pardon of sin and the favour of God may be so purchased; no, *God has shown thee, O man! what is good*. Here we are told,

1. That God has made a discovery of his mind and will to us, for the rectifying of our mistakes and the directing of our practice. (1.) It is God himself that has shown us what we must do. We need not trouble ourselves to make proposals, the terms are already settled and laid down. He whom we have offended, and to whom we are accountable, has told us upon what conditions he will be reconciled to us. (2.) It is to man that he has shown it, not only to thee, *O Israel!* but to thee, *O man!* Gentiles as well as Jews—to men, who are rational creatures, and capable of receiving the discovery, and not to brutes,—to men, for whom a remedy is provided, not to devils, whose case is desperate. What is spoken to *all men every where* in general, must by faith be applied to ourselves in particular, as if it were spoken to thee, *O man!* by name, and to no other. (3.) It is a discovery of *that which is good*, and which *the Lord requires of us*. He has shown us our end, which we should aim at, in showing us what is good, wherein our true happiness does consist; he has shown us our way in which we must walk towards that end in showing us what he requires of us. There is something which God requires we should do for him and devote to him; and it is good. It is good in itself; there is an innate goodness in moral duties, antecedent

to the command; they are not, as ceremonial observances, good because they are commanded, but commanded because they are good, consonant to the eternal rule and reason of good and evil, which are unalterable. It has likewise a direct tendency to our good; our conformity to it is not only the condition of our future happiness, but is a great expedient of our present happiness; *in keeping God's commandments there is a great reward*, as well as after keeping them. (4.) It is shown us. God has not only made it known, but made it plain; he has discovered it to us with such convincing evidence as amounts to a demonstration. *Lo this, we have searched it, so it is*.

2. What that discovery is. The good which God requires of us is not the paying of a price for the pardon of sin and acceptance with God, but doing the duty which is the condition of our interest in the pardon purchased. (1.) We must *do justly*, must *render to all their due*, according as our relation and obligation to them are; we must do wrong to none, but do right to all, in their bodies, goods, and good name. (2.) We must *love mercy*, not only be just to all we deal with, but kind to all that need us, and that we are in a capacity of doing good to. Nor must we only show mercy, but we must *love mercy*; we must delight in it, as our God does, must be glad of an opportunity to do good, and do it cheerfully. Justice is put before mercy, for we must not give that in alms which is wrongfully got, or with which our debts should be paid. *God hates robbery for a burnt-offering*. (3.) We must *walk humbly with our God*. This includes all the duties of the first table, as the two former include all the duties of the second table. We must take the Lord for our God in covenant, must attend on him and adhere to him as ours, and must make it our constant care and business to please him. Enoch's walking with God is interpreted (Heb. xi. 5) his *pleasing God*. We must, in the whole course of our conversation, conform ourselves to the will of God, keep up our communion with God, and study to approve ourselves to him in our integrity; and this we must do humbly (submitting our understandings to the truths of God and our will to his precepts and providences); we must *humble ourselves to walk with God* (so the margin reads it); every thought within us must be brought down, to be brought into obedience to God, if we would walk comfortably with him. This is that which God requires, and without which the most costly services are *vain oblations*; this is more than *all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*.

9 The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and *the man of wisdom* shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. 10 Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the



house of the wicked, and the scant measure *that is abominable*? 11 Shall I count *them* pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? 12 For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue *is* deceitful in their mouth. 13 Therefore also will I make *thee* sick in smiting thee, in making *thee* desolate because of thy sins. 14 Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied; and thy casting down *shall be* in the midst of thee; and thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and *that* which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword. 15 Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine. 16 For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof a hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people.

God, having shown them how necessary it was that they should do justly, here shows them how plain it was that they had done unjustly; and since they submitted not to his controversy, nor went the right way to have it taken up, here he proceeds in it. Observe,

I. How the action is entered against them, v. 9. God speaks to *the city*, to Jerusalem, to Samaria. His *voice cries* to it by his servants the prophets who were to *cry aloud and not spare*. Note, The voice of the prophets is *the Lord's voice*, and that *cries to the city*, cries to the country. *Doth not wisdom cry?* Prov. viii. 1. When the sin of a city cries to God his voice cries against the city; and, when the judgments of God are coming upon a city, his voice first *cries unto it*. He warns before he wounds, because he is *not willing that any should perish*. Now observe, 1. How the voice of God is discerned by some: *The man of wisdom will see thy name*. When the voice of God cries to us we may by it see his name, may discern and perceive that by which he makes himself known. Yet many see it not, are not aware of it, because they do not regard it. God *speaks once, yea, twice, and they perceive it not* (Job xxxiii. 14); but those that are men of wisdom will see it, and perceive it, and make a good use of it. Note, It is a point of true wisdom to discover the name of God in the voice of God, and to

learn what he is from what he says. *Wisdom shall see thy name, for the knowledge of the holy is understanding*. 2. What this voice of God says to all: "*Hear you the rod, and who hath appointed it*. Hear the rod when it is coming; hear it at a distance, before you see it and feel it; and be awakened to go forth to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments. Hear the rod when it has come, and is actually upon you, and you are sensible of the smart of it; hear what it says to you, what convictions, what counsels, what cautions, it speaks to you." Note, Every rod has a voice, and it is the voice of God that is to be heard in the rod of God, and it is well for those that understand the language of it, which if we would do we must have an eye to *him that appointed it*. Note, Every rod is appointed, of what kind it shall be, where it shall light, and how long it shall lie. God in every affliction *performs the thing that is appointed for us* (Job xxiii. 14), and to him therefore we must have an eye, to him we must have an ear; we must hear what he says to us by the affliction. *Hear it, and know it for thy good*, Job v. 6. The work of ministers is to explain the providences of God and to quicken and direct men to learn the lessons that are taught by them.

II. What is the ground of the action, and what are the things that are laid to their charge.

1. They are charged with injustice, a sin against the second table. Are there yet to be found among them the marks and means of fraudulent dealing? What! after all the methods that God has taken to teach them to do justly, will they yet deal unjustly? It seems, they will, v. 10. And *shall I count them pure?* v. 11. No; this is a sin which will by no means consist with a profession of purity. Those that are dishonest in their dealings have not the spots of God's children, and shall never be reckoned pure, whatever shows of devotion they may make. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*. When a man is suspected of theft, or fraud, the justice of peace will send a warrant to search his house. God here does, as it were, search the houses of these citizens, and there he finds, (1.) *Treasures of wickedness*, abundance of wealth, but it is ill-got, and not likely to prosper; for *treasures of wickedness profit nothing*. (2.) A *scant measure*, by which they sold to the poor, and so exacted upon them and cheated them. (3.) They had *wicked balances and a bag of false weights*, by which, under a pretence of weighing what they sold, and giving the buyer what was right, they did him the greatest wrong, v. 11. (4.) Those that had wealth and power in their hands abused it to oppression and extortion: *The rich men thereof are full of violence*; for those that have much would have more, and are in a capacity of making it more by the power which their abundance of wealth gives them.



They are full of violence, that is, they have their houses full of that which is got by violence. (5.) Those that had not the advantage of doing wrong by their wealth yet found means of defrauding those they dealt with: *The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies*; if they are not able to use force and violence, they use fraud and deceit; the *inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth*; they do not stick at a deliberate lie, to make a good bargain. Some understand it of their speaking falsely concerning God, saying, *The Lord seeth not; he hath forsaken the earth*, Ezek. viii. 12.

2. They are charged with idolatry (v. 6): *The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the work of the house of Ahab*. Both these kings were wicked, and *did evil in the sight of the Lord*; but the wickedness which they established by a law, concerning which they made statutes, and which was the peculiar work of that house, was idolatry. Omri walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin of provoking God to anger with their vanities, 1 Kings xvi. 26, 31. Ahab introduced the worship of Baal. These reigns were some ages before the time when this prophet lived, and yet the wickedness which they established by their laws and examples remained to this day; those statutes were still kept, and that work was still done; and the princes and people still walked in their counsels, took the same measures, and governed themselves and the people by the same politics. Observe, (1.) The same wickedness continued from one generation to another. Sin is a root of bitterness, soon planted, but not so soon plucked up again. The iniquity of former ages is often transmitted to, and entailed upon, the succeeding ones. Those that make corrupt laws, and bring in corrupt usages, are doing that which perhaps may prove the ruin of the child unborn. (2.) It was not the less evil in itself, provoking to God, and dangerous to the sinners, for its having been established and confirmed by the laws of princes, the examples of great men, and a long prescription. Though the worship of idols is enacted by the statutes of Omri, recommended by the practice of the house of Ahab, and pleads that it has been the usage of many generations, yet it is still displeasing to God and destructive to Israel; for no laws nor customs are of force against the divine command.

III. What is the judgment given upon this. Being found guilty of these crimes, the sentence is that that which God had given them warning of (v. 9) shall be brought upon them (v. 13): *Therefore also will I make thee sick, in smiting thee*. As they had smitten the poor with the rod of their oppressions, so would God in like manner smite them, so as to make them sick, sick of the gains they had unjustly gotten, so that though they had swallowed down riches they should vomit them up again, Job xx. 15 Their doom is,

1. That what they have they shall not have any comfortable enjoyment of; it shall do them no good. They grasped at more than enough, but, when they have it, it shall not be enough to make them easy and happy. What is got by fraud and oppression cannot be kept or enjoyed with any satisfaction. (1.) Their food shall not nourish them: *Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied*, either because the food shall not digest, for want of God's blessing going along with it, or because the appetite shall by disease be made insatiable and still craving, the just punishment of those that were greedy of gain and enlarged their desire of hell. Men may be surfeited with the good things of this world and yet not satisfied, Eccl. v. 10; Isa. lv. 2. (2.) Their country shall not harbour and protect them: *"Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee"*, that is, thou shalt be broken and ruined by intestine troubles, mischiefs at home enough to cast thee down, though thou shouldst not be invaded by a foreign force." God can cast a nation down by that which is in the midst of them, can consume them by a fire in their own bowels. (3.) They shall not be able to preserve what they have from a foreign force, nor to recover what they have lost: *"Thou shalt take hold of what is about to be taken from thee, but thou shalt not hold it fast, shalt catch at it, but shalt not deliver it, shalt not retrieve it."* It is meant of their wives and children, that were very dear to them, which they took hold of, as resolved not to part with them, but there is no remedy, they must go into captivity. Note, What we hold closest we commonly lose soonest, and that proves least safe which is most dear. (4.) What they save for a time shall be reserved for a future and sorer stroke: *That which thou deliverest out of the hand of one enemy will I give up to the sword of another enemy*; for God has many arrows in his quiver; if one miss the sinner, the next shall not. (5.) What they have laboured for they shall not enjoy (v. 15) *"Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap"*, it shall be blasted and withered, and there shall be nothing to reap, or an enemy shall come and reap it for himself, or thou shalt be carried into captivity, and leave it to be reaped by thou knowest not whom. Thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with oil, having no heart to make use of ornaments and refreshments when all is going to ruin. Thou shalt tread out the sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine, for many things may fall between the cup and the lip." Note, It is very grievous to be disappointed of our expectations, and not to have the pleasure of that which we have taken pains for; and this will be the just punishment of those that frustrate God's expectations from them, and answer not the cost he has been at upon them. See this threatened in the law, Lev. xxvi. 16; Deut. xxviii. 30, 38, &c.; and compare Isa. lxii. 8, 9.

2. That all they have shall at length be taken from them (v. 13): *Thou shalt be made desolate because of thy sins*; and v. 16, *a desolation and a hissing*. Sin makes a nation desolate; and when a people that have been famous and flourishing are made desolate it is the astonishment of some and the triumph of others; some lament it, and others hiss at it. Thus you shall bear the reproach of my people. Their being the people of God, in name and profession, while they kept close to their duty and kept themselves in his love, was an honour to them, and all their neighbours thought it so; but now that they have corrupted and ruined themselves, now that their sins and God's judgments have made their land desolate, their having been once the people of God does but turn so much the more to their reproach; their enemies will say, *These are the people of the Lord*, Ezek. xxxvi. 20. Note, If professors of religion ruin themselves, their ruin will be the most reproachful of any; and they in a special manner will rise at the last day to everlasting shame and contempt.

## CHAP. VII.

In this chapter, 1. The prophet, in the name of the church, sadly laments the woful decay of religion in the age wherein he lived, and the deluge of impiety and immorality which overwhelmed the nation, which levelled the differences, and bore down the fences, of all that is just and sacred, ver. 1-6. 11. The prophet, for the sake of the church, prescribes comforts, which may be of use at such a time, and gives counsel what to do. 1. They must have an eye to God, ver. 7. 2. They must courageously bear up against the insolencies of the enemy, ver. 8-10. 3. They must patiently lie down under the rebukes of their God, ver. 9. 4. They must expect no other than that the trouble would continue long, and must endeavour to make the best of it, ver. 11-13. 5. They must encourage themselves with God's promises, in answer to the prophet's prayers, ver. 14, 15. 6. They must foresee the fall of their enemies, that now triumphed over them, ver. 16, 17. 7. They must themselves triumph in the mercy and grace of God, and his faithfulness to his covenant (ver. 18-20), and with that comfortable word the prophecy concludes.

**W**OE is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: *there is no cluster to eat*: my soul desired the first-ripe fruit. 2 The good man is perished out of the earth: and *there is none upright among men*: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. 3 That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrapt it up. 4 The best of them is a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge: the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity. 5 Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. 6 For the son

dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

This is such a description of bad times as, some think, could scarcely agree to the times of Hezekiah, when this prophet prophesied; and therefore they rather take it as a prediction of what should be in the reign of Manasseh. But we may rather suppose it to be in the reign of Ahaz (and in that reign he prophesied, ch. i. 1) or in the beginning of Hezekiah's time, before the reformation he was instrumental in; nay, in the best of his days, and when he had done his best to purge out corruptions, still there was much amiss. The prophet cries out, *Woe is me!* He bemoans himself that his lot was cast in such a degenerate age, and thinks it his great unhappiness that he lived among a people that were ripening apace for a ruin which many a good man would unavoidably be involved in. Thus David cries out, *Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech!* He laments, 1. That there were so few good people to be found, even among those that were God's people; and this was their reproach: *The good man has perished out of the earth, or out of the land, the land of Canaan; it was a good land, and a land of uprightness* (Isa. xxvi. 10), but there were few good men in it, none upright among them, v. 2. *The good man is a godly man and a merciful man*: the word signifies both. Those are completely good men that are devout towards God and compassionate and beneficent towards men, that love mercy and walk with God. "These have perished; those few honest men that some time ago enriched and adorned our country are now dead and gone, and there are none risen up in their stead that tread in their steps; honesty is banished, and there is no such thing as a good man to be met with. Those that were of religious education have degenerated, and become as bad as the worst; *the godly man ceases*," Ps. xii. 1. This is illustrated by a comparison (v. 1): They were as when they have gathered the summer fruits; it was as hard a thing to find a good man as to find any of the summer-fruits (which were the choicest and best, and therefore must carefully be gathered in) when the harvest is over. The prophet is ready to say, as Elijah in his time (1 Kings xix. 10), *I, even I only, am left*. Good men, who used to hang in clusters, are now as the grape-gleanings of the vintage, here and there a berry, Isa. xvii. 6. You can find no societies of them as bunches of grapes, but those that are single persons: *There is no cluster to eat*; and the best and fullest grapes are those that grow in large clusters. Some think that this intimates not only that good people were few, but that those few were no more



who went for good people, were good for little, like the small withered grapes, the refuse that were left behind, not only by the gatherer, but by the gleaner. When the prophet observed this universal degeneracy it made him *desire the first-ripe fruit*; he wished to see such worthy good men as were in the former ages, were the ornaments of the primitive times, and as far excelled the best of all the present age as the first and full-ripe fruits do those of the latter growth, that never come to maturity. When we read and hear of the wisdom and zeal, the strictness and conscientiousness, the devotion and charity, of the professors of religion in former ages, and see the reverse of this in those of the present age, we cannot but sit down, and wish, with a sigh, *O for primitive Christianity again!* Where are the plainness and integrity of those that went before us? Where are the Israelites indeed, without guile? Our souls desire them, but in vain. The golden age is gone, and past recal; we must make the best of what is, for we are not likely to see such times as have been. 2. That there were so many wicked mischievous people among them, not only none that did any good, but multitudes that did all the hurt they could: "*They all lie in wait for blood, and hunt every man his brother.*" To get wealth to themselves, they care not what wrong, what hurt, they do to their neighbours and nearest relations. They act as if mankind were in a state of war, and force were the only right. They are as beasts of prey to their neighbours, for *they all lie in wait for blood as lions for their prey*; they thirst after it, make nothing of taking away any man's life or livelihood to serve a turn for themselves, and lie in wait for an opportunity to do it. Their neighbours are as beasts of prey to them, for *they hunt every man his brother with a net*; they persecute them as noxious creatures, fit to be taken and destroyed, though they are innocent excellent ones." We say of him that is outlawed, *Caput gerit lupinum—He is to be hunted as a wolf.* "Or they hunt them as men do the game, to feast upon it; they have a thousand cursed arts of ensnaring men to their ruin, so that they may but get by it. Thus *they do mischief with both hands earnestly*; their hearts desire it, their heads contrive it, and then *both hands* are ready to put it in execution." Note, The more eager and intent men are upon any sinful pursuit, and the more pains they take in it, the more provoking it is. 3. That the magistrates, who by their office ought to have been the patrons and protectors of right, were the practisers and promoters of wrong: *That they may do evil with both hands earnestly*, to excite and animate themselves in it, *the prince asketh, and the judge asketh, for a reward*, for a bribe, with which they will be hired to exert all their power for the supporting and carrying on of any wicked design with

*both hands.* *They do evil with both hands well* (so some read it); they do evil with a great deal of art and dexterity; they praise themselves for doing it so well. Others read it thus: *To do evil they have both hands* (they catch at an opportunity of doing mischief), *but to do good the prince and the judge ask for a reward*; if they do any good offices they are mercenary in them, and must be paid for them. The great man, who has wealth and power to do good, is not ashamed to utter his mischievous desire in conjunction with the prince and the judge, who are ready to support him and stand by him in it. *So they wrap it up*; they perplex the matter, involve it, and make it intricate (so some understand it), that they may lose equity in a mist, and so make the cause turn which way they please. It is ill with a people when their princes, and judges, and great men are in a confederacy to pervert justice. And it is a sad character that is given of them (v. 4), that *the best of them is as a brier, and the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge*; it is a dangerous thing to have any thing to do with them; *he that touches them must be fenced with iron* (2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7), he shall be sure to be scratched, to have his clothes torn, and his eyes almost pulled out. And, if this be the character of the best and most upright, what are the worst? And, when things have come to this pass, *the day of thy watchmen comes*, that is, as it follows, *the day of thy visitation*, when God will reckon with thee for all this wickedness, which is called *the day of the watchmen*, because their prophets, whom God set as watchmen over them, had often warned them of that day. When all flesh have corrupted their way, even the best and the most upright, what can be expected but a day of visitation, a deluge of judgments, as that which drowned the old world when *the earth was filled with violence*? 4. That there was no faith in man; people had grown so universally treacherous that one knew not whom to repose any confidence in, v. 5. "Those that have any sense of honour, or spark of virtue, remaining in them, have a firm regard to the laws of friendship; they would not discover what passed in private conversation, nor divulge secrets, to the prejudice of a friend. But those things are now made a jest of; you will not meet with a friend that you dare trust, whose word you dare take, or who will have any tenderness or concern for you; so that wise men shall give it and take it for a rule, *Trust you not in a friend*, for you will find him false, you can trust him no further than you can see him; and even him that passes for an honest man you will find to be so only with good looking to. Nay, as for him that undertakes to be *your guide*, to lead you into any business which he professes to understand better than you, you cannot put a confidence in him, for he will be sure to mislead you if he can get any thing by it."



Some by a guide understand a husband, who is called *the guide of thy youth*; and that agrees well enough with what follows, "*Keep the doors of thy lips from her that lieth in thy bosom, from thy own wife; take heed what thou sayest before her, lest she betray thee, as Delilah did Samson, lest she be the bird of the air that carries the voice of that which thou sayest in thy bed-chamber,*" Eccl. x. 20. It is an evil time indeed when the prudent are obliged even thus far to keep silence. 5. That children were abusive to their parents, and men had no comfort, no satisfaction, in their own families and their nearest relations, v. 6. The times are bad indeed when *the son dishonours his father*, gives him bad language, exposes him, threatens him, and studies to do him a mischief, *when the daughter rises up in rebellion against her own mother, having no sense of duty, or natural affection; and no marvel that then the daughter-in-law quarrels with her mother-in-law, and is vexatious to her.* Either they cannot agree about their property and interest, or their humours and passions clash, or, from a spirit of bigotry and persecution, *the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child*, Matt. x. 4; Luke xxi. 16. It is sad when a man's betrayers and worst enemies are the men of his own house, his own children and servants, that should be his guard and his best friends. Note, The contempt and violation of the laws of domestic duties are a sad symptom of a universal corruption of manners. Those are never likely to come to good that are undutiful to their parents, and study to be provoking to them and cross them.

7 Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. 8 Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. 9 I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. 10 Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the LORD thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets. 11 In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. 12 In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified

cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. 13 Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

The prophet, having sadly complained of the wickedness of the times he lived in, here fastens upon some considerations for the comfort of himself and his friends, in reference thereunto. The case is bad, but it is not desperate. *Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.*

I. "Though God be now displeased he shall be reconciled to us, and then all will be well, v. 7, 9. We are now under *the indignation of the Lord*; God is angry with us, and justly, because *we have sinned against him.*" Note, It is our sin against God that provokes his indignation against us; and we must see it, and own it, whenever we are under divine rebukes, that we may justify God, and may study to answer his end in afflicting us, by repenting of sin and breaking off from it. Now, at such a time, 1. We must have recourse to God under our troubles (v. 7): *Therefore I will look unto the Lord.* When a child of God has ever so much occasion to cry, *Woe is me* (as the prophet here, v. 1), yet it may be a comfort to him that he has a God to look to, a God to come to, to fly to, in whom he may rejoice and have satisfaction. All may look bright above him when all looks black and dark about him. The prophet had been complaining that there was no comfort to be had, no confidence to be put, in friends and relations on earth, and this drives him to his God: *Therefore I will look unto the Lord.* The less reason we have to delight in any creature the more reason we have to delight in God. If princes are not to be trusted, we may say, *Happy is the man that has the God of Jacob for his help, and happy am I, even in the midst of my present woes, if he be my help.* If men be false, this is our comfort, that God is faithful; if relations be unkind, he is and will be gracious. Let us therefore look above and beyond them, and overlook our disappointment in them, and look unto the Lord. 2. We must submit to the will of God in our troubles: "*I will bear the indignation of the Lord*, will bear it patiently, without murmuring and repining, *because I have sinned against him.*" Note, Those that are truly penitent for sin will see a great deal of reason to be patient under affliction. *Wherefore should a man complain for the punishment of his sin?* When we complain to God of the badness of the times we ought to complain against ourselves for the badness of our own hearts. 3. We must depend upon God to work deliverance for us, and put a good issue to our troubles in due time; we must not only look to him, but



'look for him: "I will wait for the God of my salvation, and for his gracious returns to me." In our greatest distresses we shall see no reason to despair of salvation if by faith we eye God as the God of our salvation, who is able to save the weakest upon their humble petition, and willing to save the worst upon their true repentance. And, if we depend on God as the God of our salvation, we must wait for him, and for his salvation, in his own way and his own time. Let us now see what the church is here taught to expect and promise herself from God, even when things are brought to the last extremity. (1.) *My God will hear me*; if the Lord be our God, he will hear our prayers, and grant an answer of peace to them. (2.) *"When I fall, and am in danger of being dashed in pieces by the fall, yet I shall arise, and recover myself again. I fall, but am not utterly cast down,"* Ps. xxxvii. 24. (3.) *"When I sit in darkness, desolate and disconsolate, melancholy and perplexed, and not knowing what to do, nor which way to look for relief, yet then the Lord shall be a light to me, to comfort and revive me, to instruct and teach me, to direct and guide me, as a light to my eyes, a light to my feet, a light in a dark place."* (4.) *He will plead my cause, and execute judgment for me,* v. 9. If we heartily espouse the cause of God, the just but injured cause of religion and virtue, and make it our cause, we may hope he will own our cause, and plead it. The church's cause, though it seem for a time to go against her, will at length be pleaded with jealousy, and judgment not only given against, but executed upon, the enemies of it. (5.) *"He will bring me forth to the light, make me shine eminently out of obscurity, and become conspicuous, will make my righteousness shine evidently from under the dark cloud of calumny,"* Ps. xxxvii. 6; Isa. lviii. 10. The morning of comfort shall shine forth out of the long and dark night of trouble." (6.) *"I shall behold his righteousness; I shall see the equity of his proceedings concerning me and the performance of his promises to me."*

II. Though enemies triumph and insult, they shall be silenced and put to shame, v. 8, 10. Observe here,

1. How proudly the enemies of God's people trample upon them in their distress. They said, *Where is the Lord their God?* As if because they were afflicted God had forsaken them, and they knew not where to find him with their prayers, and he knew not how to help them with his favours. This David's enemies said to him, and it was a sword in his bones, Ps. xlii. 10, and see Ps. cxv. 2. Thus, in reproaching Israel as an abandoned people, they reflected on the God of Israel as an unkind unfaithful God.

2. How comfortably the people of God by faith bear up themselves under these insults (v. 8): *"Rejoice not against me, O my enemy!*

I am now down, but shall not be always so, and when my God appears for me then she that is my enemy shall see it, and be ashamed" (not only being disappointed in her expectations of the church's utter ruin, but having the same cup of trembling put into her hand), *"then my eyes shall behold her in the same deplorable condition that I am now in; now shall she be trodden down."* Note, The deliverance of the church will be the confusion of her enemies; and their shame shall be double, when, as they have trampled upon God's people, so they shall themselves be trampled upon.

III. Though the land continue a great while desolate, yet it shall at length be replenished again, when the time, even the set time, of its deliverance comes. 1. Its salvation shall not come *till after it has been desolate*; so the margin reads it, v. 13. God has a controversy with the land, and it must lie long under his rebukes, *because of those that dwell therein*; it is their iniquity that makes their land desolate (Ps. cvii. 34); it is *for the fruit of their doings*, their evil doings which they have been themselves guilty of, and the evil fruit of them, the sins of others, which they have been accessory to by their bad influence and example. For this they must expect to smart a great while; for the world shall know that God hates sin even in his own people. 2. When it does come it shall be a complete salvation; and it seems to refer to their deliverance out of Babylon by Cyrus, which Isaiah about this time prophesied of, as a type of our redemption by Christ. (1.) *The decree shall be far removed.* God's decree concerning their captivity, and Nebuchadnezzar's decree concerning the perpetuity of it, his resolution never to release them, "these shall be set aside and revoked, and you shall hear no more of them; they shall no more lie as a yoke upon thy neck." (2.) Jerusalem and the cities of Judah shall be again reared: *Then thy walls shall be built, walls for habitation, walls for defence, house-walls, town-walls, temple-walls*; it is in order to these that the decree is repealed, Isa. xlv. 28. Though Zion's walls may lie long in ruins, there will come a day when they shall be repaired. (3.) All that belong to the land of Israel, whithersoever dispersed, and howsoever distressed, far and wide over the face of the whole earth, shall come flocking to it again (v. 12): *He shall come even to thee*, having liberty to return and a heart to return, from Assyria, whither the ten tribes were carried away, though it lay remote, and *from the fortified cities, and from the fortress*, those strongholds in which they thought they had them fast; for when God's time comes, though Pharaoh will not let the people go, God will fetch them out with a high hand. They shall come from all the remote parts, *from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain*, not turning back for fear of your discouragements, but they shall

go from strength to strength till they come to Zion. Thus in the great day of redemption God will gather his elect from the four winds.

14 Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. 15 According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things. 16 The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. 17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee. 18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. 19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. 20 Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Here is, I. The prophet's prayer to God to take care of his own people, and of their cause and interest, v. 14. When God is about to deliver his people he stirs up their friends to pray for them, and pours out a spirit of grace and supplication, Zech. xii. 10. And, when we see God coming towards us in ways of mercy, we must go forth to meet him by prayer. It is a prophetic prayer, which amounts to a promise of the good prayed for; what God directed his prophet to ask no doubt he designed to give. Now, 1. The people of Israel are here called the flock of God's heritage, for they are the sheep of his hand, the sheep of his pasture, his little flock in the world; and they are his heritage, his portion in the world. *Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.* 2. This flock dwells solitarily in the wood, or forest, in the midst of Carmel, a high mountain. Israel was a peculiar people, that dwelt alone, and was not reckoned among the nations, like a flock of sheep in a wood. They were now a desolate people (v. 13), were in the land of their captivity as sheep in a forest, in danger of being lost and made a prey of to the beasts of the forest.

They are scattered upon the mountains as sheep having no shepherd. 3. He prays that God would feed them there with his rod, that is, that he would take care of them in their captivity, would protect them, and provide for them, and do the part of a good shepherd to them: "Let thy rod and staff comfort them, even in that darksome valley; and even there let them want nothing that is good for them. Let them be governed by thy rod, not the rod of their enemies, for they are thy people."

4. He prays that God would in due time bring them back to feed in the plains of Bashan and Gilead, and no longer to be fed in the woods and mountains. *Let them feed in their own country again, as in the days of old.* Some apply this spiritually, and make it either the prophet's prayer to Christ or his Father's charge to him, to take care of his church, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and to go in and out before them while they are here in this world as in a wood, that they may find pasture as in Carmel, as in Bashan and Gilead.

II. God's promise, in answer to this prayer; and we may well take God's promises as real answers to the prayers of faith, and embrace them accordingly, for with him saying and doing are not two things. The prophet prayed that God would feed them, and do kind things for them; but God answers that he will show them marvellous things (v. 15), will do for them more than they are able to ask or think, will out-do their hopes and expectations; he will show them his marvellous lovingkindness, Ps. xvii. 7. 1. He will do that for them which shall be the repetition of the wonders and miracles of former ages—according to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt. Their deliverance out of Babylon shall be a work of wonder and grace not inferior to their deliverance out of Egypt, nay, it shall eclipse the lustre of that (Jer. xvi. 14, 15), much more shall the work of redemption by Christ. Note, God's former favours to his church are patterns of future favours, and shall again be copied out as there is occasion. 2. He will do that for them which shall be matter of wonder and amazement to the present age, v. 16, 17. The nations about shall take notice of it, and it shall be said among the heathen, *The Lord has done great things for them*, Ps. cxxvi. 2. The impression which the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon shall make upon the neighbouring nations shall be very much for the honour both of God and his church. (1.) Those that had insulted over the people of God in their distress, and gloried that when they had them down they would keep them down, shall be confounded, when they see them thus surprisingly rising up; they shall be confounded at all the might with which the captives shall now exert themselves, whom they thought for ever disabled. They shall now lay their hands upon their mouths, as being ashamed of what they have



said, and not able to say any more, by way of triumph over Israel. Nay, *their ears shall be deaf* too, so much shall they be ashamed at the wonderful deliverance; they shall stop their ears, as being not willing to hear any more of God's wonders wrought for that people, whom they had so despised and insulted over. (2.) Those that had impudently confronted God himself shall now be struck with a fear of him, and thereby brought, in profession at least, to submit to him (v. 17): *They shall lick the dust like a serpent*, they shall be so mortified, as if they were sentenced to the same curse the serpent was laid under (Gen. iii. 14), *Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat*. They shall be brought to the lowest abasements imaginable, and shall be so dispirited that they shall tamely submit to them. *His enemies shall lick the dust*, Ps. lxxii. 9. Nay, they shall *lick the dust* of the church's feet, Isa. xlix. 23. Proud oppressors shall now be made sensible how mean, how little, they are, before the great God, and they shall with trembling and the lowest submission *move out of the holes* into which they had crept (Isa. ii. 21), *like worms of the earth* as they are, being ashamed and afraid to *show their heads*; so low shall they be brought, and such abjects shall they be, when they are abased. When God did wonders for his church *many of the people of the land became Jews*, because the fear of the Jews, and of their God, *fell upon them*, Esth. viii. 17. So it is promised here: *They shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee, O Israel!* Forced submissions are often but feigned submissions; yet they redound to the glory of God and the church, though not to the benefit of the dissemblers themselves.

III. The prophet's thankful acknowledgment of God's mercy, in the name of the church, with a believing dependence upon his promise, v. 18—20. We are here taught,

1. To give to God the glory of his pardoning mercy, v. 18. God having promised to bring back the captivity of his people, the prophet, on that occasion, admires pardoning mercy, as that which was at the bottom of it. As it was their sin that brought them into bondage, so it was God's pardoning their sin that brought them out of it; Ps. lxxxv. 1, 2, and Isa. xxxiii. 24; xxxviii. 17; xl. 1, 2. The pardon of sin is the foundation of all other covenant-mercies, Heb. viii. 12. This the prophet stands amazed at, while the surrounding nations stood amazed only at those deliverances which were but the fruits of this. Note, (1.) God's people, who are the *remnant of his heritage*, stand charged with many transgressions; being but a remnant, a very few, one would hope they should all be very good, but they are not so; God's children have their spots, and often offend their Father. (2.) The gracious God is ready to pass by and pardon the iniquity and trans-

gression of his people, upon their repentance and return to him. God's people are a pardoned people, and to this they owe their all. When God pardons sin, he passes it by, does not punish it as justly he might, nor deal with the sinner according to the desert of it. (3.) Though God may for a time lay his own people under the tokens of his displeasure, yet he will not retain his anger for ever, but *though he cause grief he will have compassion*; he is not implacable; yet against those that are not of the remnant of his heritage, that are unpardoned, he will keep his anger for ever. (4.) The reasons why God pardons sin, and keeps not his anger for ever, are all taken from within himself; it is *because he delights in mercy*, and the salvation of sinners is what he has pleasure in, not their death and damnation. (5.) The glory of God in forgiving sin is, as in other things, matchless, and without compare. There is *no God like unto him* for this; no magistrate, no common person, forgives as God does. In this his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours; in this he is *God, and not man*. (6.) All those that have experienced pardoning mercy cannot but admire that mercy; it is what we have reason to stand amazed at, if we know what it is. Has God forgiven us our transgressions? We may well say, *Who is a God like unto thee?* Our holy wonder at pardoning mercy will be a good evidence of our interest in it.

2. To take to ourselves the comfort of that mercy and all the grace and truth that go along with it. God's people here, as they look back with thankfulness upon God's pardoning their sins, so they look forward with assurance upon what he would yet further do for them. His mercy *endures for ever*, and therefore as he has *shown mercy* so he will, v. 19, 20. (1.) He will renew his favours to us: *He will turn again; he will have compassion*; that is, he will again have compassion upon us as formerly he had; his compassions shall be *new every morning*; he seemed to be departing from us in anger, but he will turn again and pity us. He will turn us to himself, and then will *turn to us, and have mercy upon us*. (2.) He will renew us, to prepare and qualify us for his favour: *He will subdue our iniquities*; when he takes away the guilt of sin, that it may not damn us, he will break the power of sin, that it may not have dominion over us, that we may not fear sin, nor be led captive by it. Sin is an enemy that fights against us, a tyrant that oppresses us; nothing less than almighty grace can subdue it, so great is its power in fallen man and so long has it kept possession. But, if God forgive the sin that has been committed by us, he will subdue the sin that dwells in us, and in that there is none like him in forgiving; and all those whose sins are pardoned earnestly desire and hope to have their corruptions mortified and their iniquities subdued, and please themselves

with the hopes of it. If we be left to ourselves, our iniquities will be too hard for us; but God's grace, we trust, shall be sufficient for us to subdue them, so that they shall not rule us, and then they shall not ruin us. (3.) He will confirm this good work, and effectually provide that his act of grace shall never be repealed: *Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea*, as when he brought them out of Egypt (to which he has an eye in the promises here, v. 15) he subdued Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and cast them into the depth of the sea. It intimates that when God forgives sin he *remembers it no more*, and takes care that it shall never be remembered more against the sinner. Ezek. xviii. 22, *His transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him; they are blotted out as a cloud which never appears more*. He casts them into the sea, not near the shore-side, where they may appear again next low water, but into the *depth of the sea*, never to rise again. *All their sins* shall be cast there without exception, for when God forgives sin he forgives all. (4.) He will perfect that which concerns us, and with this good work will do all that for us which our case requires and which he

has promised (v. 20): *Then wilt thou perform thy truth to Jacob and thy mercy to Abraham*. It is in pursuance of the covenant that our sins are pardoned and our lusts mortified; from that spring all these streams flow, and with these he shall *freely give us all things*. The promise is said to be *mercy to Abraham*, because, as made to him first, it was mere mercy, preventing mercy, considering what state it found him in. But it was *truth to Jacob*, because the faithfulness of God was engaged to make good to him and his seed, as heirs to Abraham, all that was graciously promised to Abraham. See here, [1.] With what solemnity the covenant of grace is ratified to us; it was not only spoken, written, and sealed, but, which is the highest confirmation, it was *sworn to our fathers*; nor is it a modern project, but is confirmed by antiquity too; it was sworn *from the days of old*; it is an ancient charter. [2.] With what satisfaction it may be applied and relied upon by us; we may say with the highest assurance, *Thou wilt perform the truth and mercy*; not one iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground. Faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it.

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AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE PROPHECY OF  
N A H U M.

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THE name of this prophet signifies a *comforter*; for it was a charge given to all the prophets, *Comfort you, comfort you, my people*: and even this prophet, though wholly taken up in foretelling the destruction of Nineveh, which speaks terror to the Assyrians, is, even in that, comforter to the ten tribes of Israel, who, it is probable, were now lately carried captives into Assyria. It is very uncertain at what time he lived and prophesied, but it is most probable that he lived in the time of Hezekiah, and prophesied against Nineveh, after the captivity of Israel by the king of Assyria, which was in the ninth year of Hezekiah, and before Sennacherib's invading Judah, which was in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, for to that attempt, and the defeat of it, it is supposed, the first chapter has reference; and it is probable that it was delivered a little before it, for the encouragement of God's people in that day of treading down and perplexity. It is the conjecture of the learned Huetius that the two other chapters of this book were delivered by Nahum some years after, perhaps in the reign of Manasseh, and in that reign the Jewish chronologies generally place him, somewhat nearer to the time when Nineveh was conquered, and the Assyrian monarchy reduced, by Cyaxares and Nebuchadnezzar, some time before the first captivity of Judah. It is probable that Nahum did by word of mouth prophesy many things concerning Israel and Judah, as it is certain that Jonah did (2 Kings xiv. 25), though we have nothing of either of them in writing, but what related to Nineveh, of which, though a great and ancient city, yet probably we should never have heard in sacred writ if the Israel of God had not had some concern in it.



## CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, I. The inscription of the book, ver. 1. II. A magnificent display of the glory of God, in a mixture of wrath and justice against the wicked, and mercy and grace towards his people, and the discovery of his majesty and power in both, ver. 2-8. III. A particular application of this (as most interpreters think) to the destruction of Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, when they besieged Jerusalem, which was a very memorable and illustrious instance of the power both of God's justice and of his mercy, and spoke abundance of terror to his enemies and encouragement to his faithful servants, ver. 9-16.

**THE** burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

This title directs us to consider, 1. The great city against which the word of the Lord is here delivered; it is the *burden of Nineveh*, not only a prophecy and a weighty one, but a burdensome prophecy, a dead weight to Nineveh, a mill-stone hanged about its neck. Nineveh was the place concerned, and the Assyrian monarchy, which that was the royal seat of. About 100 years before this Jonah had, in God's name, foretold the speedy overthrow of this great city; but then the Ninevites repented and were spared, and that decree did not *bring forth*. The Ninevites then saw clearly how much it was to their advantage to turn from their evil way; it was the saving of their city; and yet, soon after, they returned to it again; it became worse than ever, a *bloody city*, and *full of lies and robbery*. They repented of their repentance, returned with the dog to his vomit, and at length grew worse than ever they had been. Then God sent them not this prophet, as Jonah, but this prophecy, to read them their doom, which was now irreversible. Note, The reprieve will not be continued if the repentance be not continued in. If men turn from the good they began to do, they can expect no other than that God should turn from the favour he began to show, Jer. xviii. 10. 2. The poor prophet by whom the word of the Lord is here delivered: It is *the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite*. The burden of Nineveh was what the prophet plainly foresaw, for it was his vision, and what he left upon record (it is *the book of the vision*), that, when he was gone, the event might be compared with the prediction and might confirm it. All the account we have of the prophet himself is that he was an *Elkoshite*, of the town called *Elkes*, or *Elcos*, which, Jerome says, was in Galilee. Some observe that the scripture ordinarily says little of the prophets themselves, that our faith might not stand upon their authority, but upon that of the blessed Spirit by whom their prophecies were indited.

2 God *is* jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and *is* furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath* for his enemies. 3 The LORD *is* slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit *the*

*wicked*: the LORD *hath* his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds *are* the dust of his feet. 4 He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. 5 The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. 6 Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. 7 The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. 8 But with an over-running flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

Nineveh knows not God, that God that contends with her, and therefore is here told what a God he is; and it is good for us all to mix faith with that which is here said concerning him, which speaks a great deal of terror to the wicked and comfort to good people; for this glorious description of the Sovereign of the world, like the pillar of cloud and fire, has a bright side towards Israel and a dark side towards the Egyptians. Let each take his portion from it; let sinners read it and tremble; let saints read it and triumph. The wrath of God is here revealed from heaven against his enemies, his favour and mercy are here assured to his faithful loyal subjects, and his almighty power in both, making his wrath very terrible and his favour very desirable.

I. He is a God of inflexible justice, a jealous God, and will take vengeance on his enemies; let Nineveh know this, and tremble before him. Their idols are insignificant things; there is nothing formidable in them. But the God of Israel is greatly to be feared; for, 1. He resents the affronts and indignities done him by those that deny his being or any of his perfections, that set up other gods in competition with him, that destroy his laws, arraign his proceedings, ridicule his word, or are abusive to his people. Let such know that Jehovah, the one only living and true God, is a *jealous God*, and a *revenger*; he is jealous for his own honour in the matters of his worship, and will not endure a rival; he is jealous for the comfort of his worshippers, *jealous for his land* (Joel ii. 18), and will not have that injured. He is a revenger, and *he is furious*; he *has fury* (so the word is), not as man has it, in whom it is an ungoverned passion (so he has said,

*Fury is not in me*, Isa. xxvii 4), but he has it in such a way as becomes the righteous God, to put an edge upon his justice, and to make it appear more terrible to those who otherwise would stand in no awe of it. He is *Lord of anger* (so the Hebrew phrase is for that which we read, *he is furious*); he has anger, but he has it at command and under government. Our anger is often lord over us, as theirs that have *no rule over their own spirits*, but God is always *Lord of his anger* and *weighs a path to it*, Ps. lxxviii. 50. 2. He resolves to reckon with those that put those affronts upon him. We are told here, not only that he is a revenger, but that he *will take vengeance*; he has said he will, he has sworn it, Deut. xxxii. 40, 41. Whoever are his adversaries and enemies among men, he will make them feel his resentments; and, though the sentence against his enemies is not executed speedily, yet he reserves wrath for them and reserves them for it in the day of wrath. Against his own people, who repent and humble themselves before him, he keeps *not his anger for ever*, but against his enemies he will for ever let out his anger. *He will not at all acquit the wicked* that sin, and stand to it, and do not repent, v. 3. *Those wickedly depart from their God* that depart, and never return (Ps. xviii. 21), and these he will not acquit. Humble supplicants will find him gracious, but scornful beggars will not find him easy, or that the door of mercy will be opened to a loud, but late, Lord, Lord. This revelation of the wrath of God against his enemies is applied to Nineveh (v. 8), and should be applied by all those to themselves who go on still in their trespasses: *With an over-running flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof*. The army of the Chaldeans shall overrun the country of the Assyrians, and lay it all waste. God's judgments, when they come with commission, are like a deluge to any people, which they cannot keep off nor make head against. *Darkness shall pursue his enemies*: terror and trouble shall follow them, whithersoever they go, shall pursue them to utter darkness; if they think to flee from the darkness which pursues them they will but fall into that which is before them.

II. He is a God of irresistible power, and is able to deal with his enemies, be they ever so many, ever so mighty, ever so hardy. He is *great in power* (v. 3), and therefore it is good having him our friend and bad having him our enemy. Now here,

1. The power of God is asserted and proved by divers instances of it in the kingdom of nature, where we always find its visible effects in the ordinary course of nature, and sometimes in the surprising alterations of that course. (1.) If we look up into the regions of the air, there we shall find proofs of his power, for *he has his ways in the whirlwind and the storm*. Which way soever God goes he carries a whirlwind and a storm

along with him, for the terror of his enemies, Ps. xviii. 9, &c. And, wherever there is a whirlwind and a storm, God has the command of it, the control of it, makes his way through it, goes on his way in it, and serves his own purposes by it. He spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and even *stormy winds fulfil his word*. He has *his way in the whirlwind*, that is, he goes on undiscerned, and the methods of his providence are to us unaccountable; as it is said, *His way is in the sea*. *The clouds are the dust of his feet*; he treads on them, walks on them, raises them when he pleases, as a man with his feet raises a cloud of dust. It is but by permission, or usurpation rather, that the devil is the prince of the power of the air, for that power is in God's hand. (2.) If we cast our eye upon the great deeps, there we find that the sea is his, for he made it; for, when he pleases, *he rebukes the sea and makes it dry, by drying up all the rivers* with which it is continually supplied. He gave those proofs of his power when he divided the Red Sea and Jordan, and can do the same again whenever he pleases. (3.) If we look round us on this earth, we find proofs of his power, when, either by the extreme heat and drought of summer or the cold and frost of winter, *Bashan languishes, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languishes*, the choicest and strongest flower languishes. His power is often seen in earthquakes, which shake the mountains (v. 5), melt the hills, and melt them down, and level them with the plains. When he pleases *the earth is burnt at his presence* by the scorching heat of the sun, and he could burn it with fire from heaven, as he did Sodom, and at the end of time he will burn the world *and all that dwell therein*. The earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Thus *great is the Lord and of great power*.

2. This is particularly applied to his anger. If God be an almighty God, we may thence infer (v. 6), *Who can stand before his indignation?* The Ninevites had once found God *slow to anger* (as he says v. 3), and perhaps presumed upon the mercy they had then had experience of, and thought they might make bold with him; but they will find he is just and jealous as well as merciful and gracious, and, having shown the justice of his wrath, in the next he shows the power of it, and the utter insufficiency of his enemies to contend with him. It is in vain for the stoutest and strongest of sinners to think to make their part good against the power of God's anger. (1.) See God here as a *consuming fire*, terrible and mighty. Here is his indignation against sin, and the *fierceness of his anger*, his fury *poured out*, not like water, but *like fire*, like the fire and brimstone rained on Sodom, Ps. xi. 6. Hell is the fierceness of God's anger, Rev. xvi. 19. God's anger is so fierce that it beats down all before it: *The rocks are thrown*



down by him, which seemed immovable. Rocks have sometimes been rent by the eruption of subterraneous fires, which is a faint resemblance of the fierceness of God's anger against sinners whose hearts are rocky, for none ever hardened their hearts against him, and prospered. (2.) See sinners here as stubble before the fire, weak and impotent, and a very unequal match for the wrath of God. [1.] They are utterly unable to bear up against it, so as to resist it, and put by the strokes of it: *Who can stand before his indignation?* Not the proudest and most daring sinner; not the world of the ungodly; no, not the angels that sinned. [2.] They are utterly unable to bear up under it so as to keep up their spirits, and preserve any enjoyment of themselves: *Who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?* As it is irresistible, so it is intolerable. Some of the effects of God's displeasure in this world a man may bear up under, but the *fierceness of his anger*, when it fastens immediately upon the soul, who can bear? Let us therefore *fear before him*; let us *stand in awe, and not sin*.

III. He is a God of infinite mercy; and in the midst of all this wrath mercy is remembered. *Let the sinners in Zion be afraid*, that go on still in their transgressions, but let not those that trust in God tremble before him. For, 1. He is *slow to anger* (v. 3), not easily provoked, but ready to show mercy to those who have offended him and to receive them into favour upon their repentance. 2. When the tokens of his rage against the wicked are abroad he takes care for the safety and comfort of his own people (v. 7): *The Lord is good* to those that are good, and to them he will be a *stronghold in the day of trouble*. Note, The same almighty power that is exerted for the terror and destruction of the wicked is engaged, and shall be employed, for the protection and satisfaction of his own people; he is able both to save and to destroy. In the day of public trouble, when God's judgments are in the earth, laying all waste, he will be a place of defence to those that by faith put themselves under his protection, those that trust in him in the way of their duty, that live a life of dependence upon him and devotedness to him; he knows them, he owns them for his, he takes cognizance of their case, knows what is best for them, and what course to take most effectually for their relief. They are perhaps obscure and little regarded in the world, but the Lord knows them, Ps. i. 6.

9 What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time. 10 For while *they be* folden together *as* thorns, and while they are drunken *as* drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry. 11 There is *one* come out of thee, that

imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor. 12 Thus saith the LORD; Though *they be* quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. 13 For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder. 14 And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, *that* no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile. 15 Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

These verses seem to point at the destruction of the army of the Assyrians under Sennacherib, which may well be reckoned a part of the burden of Nineveh, the head city of the Assyrian empire, and a pledge of the destruction of Nineveh itself about 100 years after; and this was an event which Isaiah, with whom probably this prophet was contemporary, spoke much of. Now observe here,

I. The great provocation which the Assyrians gave to God, the just and jealous God, for which, though *slow to anger*, he would take vengeance (v. 11): *There is one come out of thee, that imagines evil against the Lord*—Sennacherib, and his spokesman Rabshakeh. They framed an evil letter and an evil speech, not only against Hezekiah and his people, but against God himself, reflecting upon him as level with the gods of the heathen, and unable to protect his worshippers, dissuading his people from putting confidence in him, and urging them rather to put themselves under the protection of the *great king, the king of Assyria*. They contrived to alter the property of Jerusalem, that it should be no longer the city of the Lord, the holy city. This one, this mighty one, so he thinks himself, that comes out of Nineveh, *imagining evil against the Lord*, brings upon Nineveh this burden. Never was the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth more daringly, more blasphemously affronted than by Sennacherib at that time. He was a *wicked counsellor* who counselled them to despair of God's protection, and surrender themselves to the king of Assyria, and endeavour to put them out of conceit with Hezekiah's reformation (Isa. xxxvi. 7); with this wicked counsellor he here expostulates

(v. 9): "*What do you imagine against the Lord?* What a foolish wicked thing it is for you to plot against God, as if you could outwit divine wisdom and overpower omnipotence itself!" Note, There is a great deal imagined against the Lord by the gates of hell, and against the interests of his kingdom in the world; but it will prove a *vain thing*, Ps. ii. 1, 2. *He that sits in heaven laughs at the imaginations of the pretenders to politics against him, and will turn their counsels headlong.*

II. The great destruction which God would bring upon them for it, not immediately upon the whole monarchy (the ruin of that was deferred till the measure of their iniquity was full), but,

1. Upon the army; God will *make an utter end* of that; it shall be totally cut off and ruined at one blow; one fatal stroke of the destroying angel shall lay them dead upon the spot; *affliction shall not rise up the second time*, for it shall not need. With some sinners God makes a quick despatch, does their business at once. Divine vengeance goes not by one certain rule, nor in one constant track, but one way or other, by acute diseases or chronic ones, by slow deaths or lingering ones, he will *make an utter end* of all his enemies, who persist in their imaginations against him. We have reason to think that the Assyrian army were mostly of the same spirit, and spoke the same language, with their general, and now God would take them to task, though they did but say as they were taught; and it shall appear that they have laid themselves open to divine wrath by their own act and deed, v. 10. (1.) They are *as thorns* that entangle one another, and are *folded together*. They make one another worse, and more inveterate against God and his Israel, harden one another's hearts, and strengthen one another's hands, in their impiety; and therefore God will do with them as the husbandman does with a bush of thorns when he cannot part them: he puts them all into the fire together. (2.) They are *as drunken men*, intoxicated with pride and rage; and such as they shall be irrecoverably overthrown and destroyed. They shall be as drunkards, besotted to their own ruin, and shall stumble and fall, and make themselves a reproach, and be justly laughed at. (3.) They shall be *devooured as stubble fully dry*, which is irresistibly and irrecoverably consumed by the flame. The judgments of God are as devouring fire to those that make themselves as stubble to them. It is again threatened concerning this great army (v. 12) that *though they be quiet and likewise many*, very secure, not fearing the sallies out of the besieged upon them, because *they are numerous*, yet *thus shall they be cut down*, or certainly shall they be cut down, as grass and corn are cut down, with as little ado, when *he shall pass through*, even the destroying angel

that is commissioned to cut them down. Note, The security of sinners, and their confidence in their own strength, are often presages of ruin approaching.

2. Upon the king. He *imagined evil against the Lord*, and shall he escape? No (v. 14): "*The Lord has given a commandment concerning thee*; the decree has gone forth, *that thy name be no more sown*, that thy memory perish, that thou be no more talked of as thou hast been, and that the report of thy mighty actions be dispersed upon the wings of fame and celebrated with her trumpet." Because Sennacherib's son reigned in his stead, some make this to point at the overthrow of the Assyrian empire not long after. Note, Those that *imagine evil against the Lord* hasten evil upon themselves and their own families and interests, and ruin their own names by dishonouring his name. It is further threatened, (1.) That the images he worshipped should be cut off from their temple, the *graven image* and the *molten image out of the house of his gods*, which, some think, was fulfilled when Sennacherib was slain by his two sons, *as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god*, by which barbarous parricide we may suppose the temple was looked upon as defiled, and was therefore disused, and the images were cut off from it, the worshippers of those images no longer attending there. Or it may be taken more generally to denote the utter ruin of Assyria; the army of the enemy shall lay all waste, and not spare even the images of their gods, by which God would intimate to them that one of the grounds of his controversy with them was their idolatry. (2.) That Sennacherib's grave shall be made there, some think in the house of his god; there he is slain, and there he shall be buried, *for he is vile*; he lies under this perpetual mark of disgrace, that he had so far lost his interest in the natural affection of his own children that two of them murdered him. Or it may be meant of the ignominious fall of the Assyrian monarchy itself, upon the ruins of which that of Babylon was raised. What a noise was made about the grave of that once formidable state, but now despicable, is largely described, Ezek. xxxi. 3, 11, 15, 16. Note, Those that make themselves vile by scandalous sins God will make vile by shameful punishments.

III. The great deliverance which God would hereby work for his own people and the city that was called by his name. The ruin of the church's enemies is the salvation of the church, and a very great salvation it was that was wrought for Jerusalem by the overthrow of Sennacherib's army.

1. The siege shall hereby be raised: "*Now will I break his yoke from off thee*, by which thou art kept in servitude, and *will burst thy bonds asunder*, by which thou seemest bound over to the Assyrian's wrath." That vast victorious army, when it forced



free quarters for itself throughout all the land of Judah, and lived at discretion there, was as yokes and bonds upon them. Jerusalem, when it was besieged, was, as it were, bound and fettered by it; but, when the destroying angel had done his work, Jerusalem's bonds were burst asunder, and it was set at liberty again. This was a figure of the great salvation, by which the Jerusalem that is above is made free, is made free indeed.

2. The enemy shall be so weakened and dispirited that they shall never make any such attempt again, and the end of this trouble shall be so well gained by the grace of God that there shall be no more occasion for such a severe correction. (1.) God will not again afflict Jerusalem; his anger is *turned away*, and he says, *It is enough*; for he has by this fright *accomplished his whole work upon Mount Zion* (Isa. x. 12), and therefore "*though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more*;" the bitter portion shall not be repeated unless there be need and the patient's case call for it; for God *doth not afflict willingly*. (2.) The enemy shall not dare again to attack Jerusalem (v. 15): *The wicked shall no more pass through thee* as they have done, to lay all waste, *for he is utterly cut off* and disabled to do it. His army is cut off, his spirit cut off, and at length he himself is cut off.

3. The tidings of this great deliverance shall be published and welcomed with abundance of joy throughout the kingdom, v. 15. While Sennacherib prevailed, and carried all before him, every day brought bad news; but now, *behold, upon the mountains, the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, the feet of the evangelist*; he is seen coming at a distance upon the mountains, as fast as his feet will carry him; and how pleasant a sight is it once more to see a messenger of peace, after we have received so many of Job's messengers! We find these words made use of by another prophet to illustrate the mercy of the deliverance of the people of God out of Babylon (Isa. lii. 7), not that the prophets stole the word one from another (as those did, Jer. xxiii. 30), but, speaking by the same Spirit, they often used the same expressions; and it may be of good use for ministers to testify their consent to wholesome truths (1 Tim. vi. 3) by concurring in the same forms of sound words, 2 Tim. i. 13. These words are also quoted by the apostle, both from Isaiah and Nahum, and applied to the great redemption wrought out for us by our Lord Jesus, and the publishing of it to the world by the everlasting gospel, Rom. x. 15. Christ's ministers are those messengers of good tidings, that *preach peace by Jesus Christ*. *How beautiful are the feet of those messengers!* How welcome their message to those that see their misery and danger by reason of sin! And observe, He that brings these good tidings brings with them a

call to Judah to *keep her solemn feasts and perform her vows*. During the trouble, (1.) The ordinary feasts had been intermitted. *Inter arma silent leges*—*The voice of law cannot be heard amidst the shouts of battle*. While Jerusalem was *encompassed with armies* they could not go thither to worship; but now that the embargo is taken off they must return to the observance of their feasts; and the feasts of the Lord will be doubly sweet to the people of God when they have been for some time deprived of the benefit of them and God graciously restores them their opportunities again, for we are taught the worth of such mercies by the want of them. (2.) They had made vows to God, that, if he would deliver them out of this distress, they would do something extraordinary in his service, to his honour; and now that the deliverance is wrought they are called upon to perform their vows; the promise they had then made must now be made good, for *better it is not to vow than to vow and not to pay*. And those words, *The wicked shall no more pass through thee*, may be taken as a promise of the perfecting of the good work of reformation which Hezekiah had begun; the wicked shall not, as they have done, walk on every side, but they shall be cut off, and the baffling of the attempts from the wicked enemies abroad is a mercy indeed to a nation when it is accompanied with the restraint and reformation of the wicked at home, who are its more dangerous enemies.

#### CHAP. II.

We now come closer to Nineveh, that great city; she took not warning by the destruction of her armies and the fall of her king, and therefore may expect, since she persists in her enmity to God, that he will proceed in his controversy with her. Here is foretold, I. The approach of the enemy that should destroy Nineveh, and the terror of his military preparations, ver. 1-5. II. The taking of the city, ver. 6. III. The captivity of the queen, the flight of the inhabitants, the seizing of all its wealth, and the great consternation it should be in, ver. 7-10. IV. All this is traced up to its true causes—their sinning against God and God's appearing against them, ver. 11-13. All this was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar, in the first year of his reign, in conjunction with Cyaxares, or Achaemenus, king of the Medes, conquered Nineveh, and made himself master of the Assyrian monarchy.

**H**E that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make *thy* loins strong, fortify *thy* power mightily. 2 For the Lord hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine-branches. 3 The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots *shall be* with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir-trees shall be terribly shaken. 4 The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the light-

nings. 5 He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. 6 The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved. 7 And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead *her* as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. 8 But Nineveh *is* of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, *shall they cry*; but none shall look back. 9 Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for *there is* none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture. 10 She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain *is* in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness.

Here is, I. An alarm of war sent to Nineveh, v. 1. The prophet speaks of it as just at hand, for it is neither doubtful nor far distant: "Look about thee, and see, *he that dashes in pieces has come up before thy face*. Nebuchadnezzar, who is noted, and will be yet more so, for dashing nations in pieces, begins with thee, and will dissipate and disperse thee;" so some render the word. Babylon is called the *hammer of the whole earth*, Jer. l. 23. The attempt of Nebuchadnezzar upon Nineveh is public, bold, and daring: "*He has come up before thy face*, avowing his design to ruin thee; and therefore stand to thy arms, *O Nineveh! keep the munition*; secure thy towers and magazines: *watch the way*; set guards upon all the avenues to the city; *make thy loins strong*; encourage thy soldiers; animate thyself and them; *fortify thy power mightily*, as cities do when an enemy is advancing against them" (this is spoken ironically); "do the utmost thou canst, yet thou shalt not be able to put by the stroke of this judgment, for *there is no counsel or strength against the Lord*."

II. A manifesto published, showing the causes of the war (v. 2): *The Lord has turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel*, that is, 1. The Assyrians have been abusive to Jacob, the two tribes (have humbled and mortified them), as well as to Israel, the ten tribes, *have emptied them, and marred their vine-branches*. For this God will reckon with them; though done long since, it shall come into the account now against that kingdom, and Nineveh the head-city of it. God's quarrel with them is for the violence done to Jacob. Or, (2.) God is now by Nebuchadnezzar about to turn away the pride of Jacob by the captivity of the two

tribes, as he did the pride of Israel by their captivity; he has done it; he has determined to do it, to bring *emptiers* upon them, and the enemy that is to do it must begin with Nineveh, and reduce that first, and humble the pride of that. God is looking upon proud cities, and abasing them, even those that are nearest to him. Samaria is humbled, and Jerusalem is to be humbled, and their pride brought low; and shall not Nineveh, that proud city, be brought down too? *Emptiers have emptied the cities, and marred the vine-branches* in the country of Jacob and Israel; and must not the excellency of Nineveh, that is so much her pride, be turned away too?

III. A particular account given in of the terrors wherein the invading enemy shall appear against Nineveh; every thing shall contribute to make him formidable. 1. *The shields of his mighty men are made red*, and probably their other arms and array, as if they were already tintured with the blood they had shed, or intended hereby to signify they would put all to the sword; they hung out a red flag, in token that they would give no quarter. 2. *The valiant men are in scarlet*; not only red clothes, to intimate what bloody work they designed to make, but rich clothes, to intimate the wealth of the army, and that is the sinews of war. 3. *The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation*; when they are making their approaches, they shall fly as swiftly as lightning; the wheels shall strike fire upon the stones, and those that drive them shall drive furiously with a flaming indignation, as Jehu drove. Or they carried flaming torches with them in the open chariots, when they made their approach in the night, as Gideon's soldiers carried lamps in their pitchers, to be both a guide to themselves and a terror to their enemies, and with them to set all on fire wherever they went. 4. *The fir-trees shall be terribly shaken*; the great men of Nineveh, that overtop their neighbours, as the stately firs do the shrubs; or the very standing trees shall be made to shake by the violent concussions of the earth, which that great army shall cause. 5. The chariots of war shall be very terrible (v. 4): *They shall rage in the streets*, that is, those that drive them shall rage; you would think the chariots themselves raged; they shall be so numerous, and drive with so much fury, that even in the broad ways, where, one would think, there should be room enough, they shall *jostle one another*; and these iron chariots shall be made so bright that in the beams of the sun they shall seem like torches in the night; they shall run like the lightnings, so swiftly, so furiously. Nebuchadnezzar's commanders are here called his *worthies*, his *gallants* (so the margin reads it), his *heroes*; those he shall reckon, and order them immediately and without fail to render themselves at their respec-



tive posts, for he is entering upon action, is resolved to take the field immediately, and to open the campaign with the siege of Nineveh. *His worthies shall remember* (so some read it); they shall be mindful of the duty of their place, and the charge they have received, and shall thereby be made so intent upon their business that they *shall stumble in their walks*, shall make more haste than good speed; they stumble, but shall not fall; for *they shall make haste to the wall thereof*, shall open the trenches; and the defence, or the covered way, shall be prepared (something to shelter them from the darts of the besieged), and they shall so closely carry on the siege, and with so much vigour, that at length the *gates of the rivers shall be opened* (v. 6); those gates of Nineveh which open upon the river Tigris (on which Nineveh was built) shall be first forced by, or betrayed to, the enemy, and by those gates they shall enter. And then the *palace shall be dissolved*, either the king's house or the house of Nisroch his god; the same word signifies both a palace and a temple. When the God of heaven goes forth to contend with a people, neither the palaces nor their kings, neither the temples nor their gods, can protect and shelter them, but must all inevitably fall with them.

IV. A prediction of the consequences of this; and it is easy to guess how dismal those will be. 1. The queen shall fall into the hands of the enemy (v. 7): *Huzzab shall be led away captive*; she that was *established* (so some read it), thought herself safe because she was concealed and shut up in secret, shall be *discovered* (so the margin reads it) and shall be *led away captive*, in greater disgrace than that of common prisoners; she shall be *brought up* in a mock state, and her *maids of honour shall lead her*, because she is weak and faint, not able to bear such frights and hardships, which are doubly hard and frightful to those that have not been used to them; they shall attend her, not to speak cheerfully to her and to encourage her, but murmuring and moaning themselves, as *with the voice of doves, the doves of the valleys* (Ezek. vii. 16), noted for their *mourning*, Isa. xxxviii. 14; lix. 11. They shall be *tabering upon their breasts*, beating their own breasts in grief and vexation, as if they were *drumming* upon them, for so the word signifies. 2. The inhabitants, though numerous, shall none of them be able to make head against the invaders, or stand their ground (v. 8): *Nineveh is of old like a pool of water*, replenished with people as a pool with water (and *waters* signify *multitudes*, Rev. xvii. 15); or as those waters with fish; it was long ago a populous city; in Jonah's time there were 120,000 little children in it (Jonah iv. 11), and, ordinarily, cities and countries are increasing in their number every year; but, though they have so many hands to be employed in the public

service, yet they shall not be able to inspire one another with courage, but *they shall flee away like cowards*. Their commanders shall do what they can to animate them; they shall cry, "*Stand, stand, have a good heart on it, and we shall do well enough; but none shall so much as look back*"; they shall not have the least spark of courage remaining, but every one shall think it his wisest course to make his best of the opportunity to escape; they shall not so much as look back to see who calls for them. Note, God can dispirit the strongest and boldest, in the day of distress, so that they shall not be what one would expect from them, but *like a pool of water*, the water whereof is dried up and gone. 3. The wealth of the city shall become a prey, and all its rich furniture shall fall into the hands of the victorious enemy (v. 9); they shall thus animate and excite one another to plunder: *Take the spoil of silver; take the spoil of gold*; thus the officers shall stir up the soldiers to improve their opportunity; here are silver and gold enough for them, for *there is no end of the store of money and plate*. Nineveh, having been *of old like a pool of water*, has gathered a vast deal of mud; and abundance of glory it has *out of all the pleasant furniture*, all the *vessels of desire*, which they have gloried in and which shall now be a prey and a pride to the conquerors. Note, Those who prepare raiment as the clay, and heap up silver as the dust, know not who may put on the raiment and divide the silver, Job xxvii. 16, 17. Thus this rich city is empty, and void, and waste, v. 10. See the vanity of worldly wealth; instead of defending its owners, it does but expose them, and enable their enemies to do them so much the more mischief. 4. The soldiers and people shall have no heart to appear for the defence of the city. Their spirits shall *melt away like wax before the fire*; their *knees shall smite together* (as Belshazzar's did, in his agony, Dan v. 6), so that they shall not be able to stand their ground, no, nor to make their escape; *much pain shall be in all loins*, as is the case in extreme frights, so that they shall not be able to hold up their backs. And the *faces of them all shall gather blackness*, like that of a pot that is every day over the fire; so the word signifies. Note, Guilt in the conscience will fill men with terror in an evil day, and those who place their happiness in the wealth of this world and set their hearts upon it think themselves undone when their silver, and their gold, and their pleasant furniture are taken from them.

11 Where *is* the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, *even* the old lion, walked, *and* the lion's whelp, and none made *them* afraid? 12 The lion did tear in pieces enough for his



whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. 13 Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

Here we have Nineveh's ruin, 1. Triumphed in by its neighbours, who now remember against it all the oppressions and abuse of power it had been guilty of in its pomp and prosperity (v. 11, 12): *Where is the dwelling of the lions?* It is gone; there appear no remnants, no footsteps, of it. *Where is the feeding place of the young lions,* where they glutted themselves with prey? The princes of Nineveh had been as lions, as beasts of prey; cruel tyrants are no better, nay, in this respect much worse—that, being men, humanity is expected from them; nay, if they were indeed lions, they would not prey upon those of their own kind. *Sævis inter se convenit ursæ—Fierce bears agree together.* But in the shape of men they had the cruelty of lions: they walked in Nineveh as a lion in the woods, and none made them afraid; every one stood in awe of them, and they were under no apprehensions of danger from any; though nobody loved them, every body feared them, and that was all they desired. *Oderint, dum metuant—Let them hate, so that they do but fear.* The king himself, as well as every prince, made it his business, by all the arts of violence and extortion, to enrich himself and raise his family; he did *tear in pieces enough for his whelps* (and no little would be enough for them) and he *strangled for his lionesses*, killed all that came near him, and seized what they had for his children, for his wives and concubines, and *filled his holes with prey and his dens with ravin*, as lions are wont to do. Note, Many make it an excuse for their rapine and injustice that they have wives and children to provide for, whereas what is so got will never do them any good; those that *fear the Lord*, and get what they have honestly, shall not want a competency for themselves and theirs; *verily they shall be fed*, when the young lions, though dens and holes were filled with prey and ravin for them, shall lack, and suffer hunger, Ps. xxxiv. 10. 2. It is avowed by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth; it is his doing, and let all the world take notice that it is so (v. 13): *Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.* And what good can hosts do for her in her defence, when the Lord of hosts is against her for her destruction? The oppressors in Nineveh thought they only set their neighbours against them, who were not a match for them, and whom they could easily overpower;

but it proved they set God against them, who is, and will be, the asserter of right and the avenger of wrong. God is against the princes of Nineveh, and then, (1.) These military preparations will stand them in no stead: *I will burn their chariots in the smoke*; he does not say *in the fire*, but, in contempt of them, the very *smoke* of God's indignation shall serve to burn their chariots; they shall be consumed as soon as the fire of his indignation is kindled, while as yet it does but smoke, and not flame out. Or, The drivers of the chariots shall be smothered and stifled with the smoke; then the *chariots of their glory* shall be the shame of their families, Isa. xxii. 18. (2.) Their children, the hopes of their families, shall be cut off: *The sword shall devour the young lions*, whom they were so solicitous to provide for by oppression and extortion. Note, It is just with God to deprive those of their children, or (which is all one) of comfort in them, that take sinful courses to enrich them, and (as has been said of some) damn their souls to make their sons gentlemen. (3.) The wealth they have heaped up by fraud and violence shall neither be enjoyed by them nor employed for them: *I will cut off thy prey from the earth*; not only thou shalt not be the better for it, but no one else shall. Some understand it of the disabling of them for the future to prey upon their neighbours. (4.) Their agents abroad shall not have that respect from their neighbours and that influence upon them which sometimes they had had: *The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard*, no more be heeded, which some think refers to Rabshakeh, one of Nineveh's messengers, that had blasphemed the living God, an iniquity which was remembered against Nineveh long after. Those are not worthy to be heard again that have once spoken reproachfully of God.

### CHAP. III.

This chapter goes on with the burden of Nineveh, and concludes it.

1. The sins of that great city are charged upon it, murder (ver. 1), whoredom and witchcraft (ver. 4), and a general extent of wickedness, ver. 19. 11. Judgments are here threatened against it, blood for blood (ver. 2, 3), and shame for shameful sins, ver. 5–7. 111. Instances are given of the like desolations brought upon other places for the like sins, ver. 8–11. IV. The overthrow of all those things which they depended upon, and put confidence in, is foretold, ver. 12–19.

**W**OE to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; 2 The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. 3 The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: 4 Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the



mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. 5 Behold, I *am* against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. 6 And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. 7 And it shall come to pass, *that* all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?

Here is, I. Nineveh arraigned and indicted. It is a high charge that is here drawn up against that great city, and neither her numbers nor her grandeur shall secure her from prosecution. 1. It is a *city of blood*, in which a great deal of innocent blood is shed by unrighteous war, or under colour and pretence of public justice, or by suffering barbarous murders to go unpunished; for this the righteous God will make inquisition. 2. *It is all full of lies*; truth is banished from among them; there is no such thing as honesty; one knows not whom to believe nor whom to trust. 3. It is all full of *robbery* and rapine; no man cares what mischief he does, nor to whom he does it: *The prey departs not*, that is, they never know when they have got enough by spoil and oppression. They shed blood, and told lies, in pursuit of the prey, that they might enrich themselves. 4. There is a *multitude of whoredoms* in it, that is, idolatries, spiritual whoredoms, by which she defiled herself, and to which she seduced the neighbouring nations, as a well-favoured harlot, and sold and ruined *nations through her whoredoms*. 5. She is a *mistress of witchcrafts*, and by them she *sells families*, v. 4. That which Nineveh aimed at was a universal monarchy, to be the metropolis of the world, and to have all her neighbours under her feet; to compass this, she used not only arms, but arts, compelling some, deluding others, into subjection to her, and wheedling them as a harlot by her charms to lay their necks under her yoke, suggesting to them that it would be for their advantage. She courted them to join with her in her idolatrous rites, to tie them the faster to her interests, and made use of her wealth, power, and greatness, to draw people into alliances with her, by which she gained advantages over them, and made a hand of them. These were her whoredoms, like those of Tyre, Isa. xxiii. 15, 17. These were her witchcrafts, with which she unaccountably gained dominion. And for this that God has a quarrel with her who, having

*made of one blood all nations of men*, never designed one to be a nation of tyrants and another of slaves, and who claims it as his own prerogative to be universal Monarch.

II. Nineveh condemned to ruin upon this indictment. Woe to this bloody city! v. 1. See what this woe is.

1. Nineveh had with her cruelties been a terror and destruction to others, and therefore destruction and terror shall be brought upon her. Those that are for overthrowing all that come in their way will, sooner or later, meet with their match. (1.) Hear the alarm with which Nineveh shall be terrified, v. 2. It is a formidable army that advances against it; you may hear them at a distance, *the noise of the whip*, driving the chariot-horses with fury; you may hear the noise of *the rattling of the wheels*, the prancing horses, and *the jumping chariots*; the very noise is frightful, but much more so when they know that all this force is coming with all this speed against them, and they are not able to make head against it. (2.) See the slaughter with which Nineveh shall be laid waste (v. 3), the sword drawn with which execution shall be done, *the bright sword lifted up and the glittering spear*, the dazzling brightness of which is very terrible to those whom they are lifted up against. See what havoc these make when they are commissioned to slay: *There is a great number of carcasses*, for the slain of the land shall be many; *there is no end of their corpses*; there is such a *multitude of slain* that it is in vain to go about to take the number of them; they lie so thick that passengers are ready to stumble *upon their corpses* at every step. The destruction of Sennacherib's army, which, in the morning, were *all dead corpses*, is perhaps looked upon here as a figure of the like destruction that should afterwards be in Nineveh; for those that will not take warning by judgments at a distance shall have them come nearer.

2. Nineveh had with her whoredoms and witchcrafts drawn others to shameful wickedness, and therefore God will load her with shame and contempt (v. 5—7): *The Lord of hosts is against her*, and then she shall be exposed to the highest degree of disgrace and ignominy, shall not only lose all her charms, but shall be made to appear very odious. When it shall be seen that while she courted her neighbours it was with design to ruin their liberty and property, when all her wicked artifices shall be brought to light, then her *shame is discovered to the nations*. When her proud pretensions are baffled, and her vain towering hopes of an absolute and universal dominion brought to nought, and she appears not to have been so strong and considerable as she would have been thought to be, then to *see the nakedness of the land do they come*, and it appears ridiculous. Then do they *cast abominable filth upon her*, as upon a carted strumpet, and

*make her vile* as the offscouring of all things; that great city, which all the nations had made court to and coveted an alliance with, has become a gazing-stock, a laughing-stock. Those that formerly looked upon her, and fled to her, in hopes of protection from her, now *look upon her and flee from her*, for fear of being ruined with her. Note, Those that abuse their honour and interest will justly be disgraced and abandoned, and, because miserable, will be made contemptible, and thereby be made more miserable. When Nineveh is laid waste *who will bemoan her?* Her trouble will be so great, and her sense of it so deep, as not to admit relief from sympathy, or any comforting considerations; or, if it would, none shall do any such good office: *When shall I seek comforters for thee?* Note, Those that showed no pity in the day of their power can expect to find no pity in the day of their fall. When those about Nineveh, that had been deceived by her wiles, come to be undeceived in her ruin, every one shall insult over her, and none bemoan her. This was Nineveh's fate, when she was made a spectacle, or gazing-stock. Note, The greater men's show was in the day of their abused prosperity the greater will their shame be in the day of their deserved destruction. *I will make thee an example*; so Drusus reads it. Note, When proud sinners are humbled and brought down it is designed that others should take example by them not to lift up themselves in security and insolence when they prosper in the world.

8 Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, *that had* the waters round about it, whose rampart *was* the sea, *and* her wall *was* from the sea? 9 Ethiopia and Egypt *were* her strength, and *it was* infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers. 10 Yet *was* she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains. 11 Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy. 12 All thy strong holds *shall be like* fig-trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. 13 Behold, thy people in the midst of thee *are* women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars. 14 Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy

strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln. 15 There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts. 16 Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. 17 Thy crowned *are* as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, *but* when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they *are*. 18 Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell *in the dust*: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth *them*. 19 *There is* no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?

Nineveh has been told that God is against her, and then none can be for her, to stand her in any stead; yet she sets God himself at defiance, and his power and justice, and says, *I shall have peace*. Threatened folks live long; therefore here the prophet largely shows how vain her confidences would prove and insufficient to ward off the judgment of God. To convince them of this,

I. He shows them that other places, which had been as strong and as secure as they, could not keep their ground against the judgments of God. Nineveh shall fall unpitied and uncomforted (for miserable comforters will those prove who speak peace to those on whom God will fasten trouble), and she shall not be able to help herself: *Art thou better than populous No?* v. 8. He takes them off from their vain confidences by quoting precedents. The city mentioned is *No*, a great city in the land of Egypt (Jer. xli. 25), *No-Ammon*, so some read it both there and here. We read of it, Ezek. xxx. 14—16. Some think it was *Diospolis*, others *Alexandria*. As God said to Jerusalem, *Go, see what I did to Shiloh* (Jer. vii. 12), so to Nineveh that great city, *Go, see what I did to populous No*. Note, It will help to keep us in a holy fear of the judgments of God to consider that we are not better than those that have fallen under those judgments before us. We deserve them as much, and are as little able to grapple with them. This also should help to reconcile us to afflictions. Are we better than such and such, who were in like manner exercised? Nay, were not



they better than we, and less likely to be afflicted? Now, concerning No, observe, 1. How firm her standing seemed to be, v. 6. She was fortified both by nature and art, *was situate among the rivers*. Nile, in several branches, not only watered her fields, but guarded her wall. *Her rampart was the sea, the lake of Mareotis, an Egyptian sea, like the sea of Tiberias.* Her wall was from the sea; it was fenced with a wall which was thought to make the place impregnable. It was also supported by its interests and alliances abroad, v. 9. *Ethiopia, or Arabia, was her strength*, either by the wealth brought to her in a way of trade or by the auxiliary forces furnished for military service. The whole country of Egypt also contributed to the strength of this populous city; so that it was *infinite, and there was no end of it* (so it might be rendered); she set no bounds to her ambition and knew no end of her wealth and strength; people flocked to her endlessly, and she thought there never would be any end of it; but it is God's prerogative to be infinite. *Put and Lubim were thy helpers*, two neighbouring countries of Africa, Mauritania and Libya, that is, Libya Cyrenica, a country that Egypt had much dependence upon. No, thus helped, seemed to sit as a queen, and was not likely to see any sorrow. But, 2. See how fatal her fall proved to be (v. 10): *Yet was she carried away*, and her strength failed her; even she that was so strong, so secure, yet *went into captivity*. This refers to some destruction of that city which was then well-known, and probably fresh in memory, though not recorded in history; for the destruction of it by Nebuchadnezzar (if we should understand this prophetically) could not be made an example to Nineveh; for the reducing of Nineveh was one of the first of his victories and that of Egypt one of the last. The strength and grandeur of that great city could not be its protection from military execution. (1.) Not from that which was most barbarous; for *her young children* had no compassion shown them, but were *dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets* by the merciless conquerors. (2.) Not from that which was most inglorious and disgraceful: *They cast lots for her honourable men* that were made prisoners of war, who should have them for their slaves. So many had they of them that they knew not what to do with them, but they made sport with throwing dice for them; *all her great men*, that used to be adorned on state-days with chains of gold, were now bound in chains of iron; they were *pinioned or handcuffed* (so the word properly signifies), not only as slaves, but as condemned malefactors. What a mortification was this to *populous No*, to have her honourable men and great men, that were her pride and confidence, thus abused! Now hence he infers against Nineveh (v. 11), "Thou also shalt be intoxicated, infatuated;

thou also shalt reel and stagger, as drunk with the cup of the Lord's fury, that shall be put into thy hand" (see Jer. xxv. 17, 27); "*Thou shalt fall and rise no more.* The cup shall go round, and come to thy turn, O Nineveh! to drink off at last, and shall be to thee as the waters of jealousy."

II. He shows them that all those things which they reposed a confidence in should fail them. 1. Did the men of Nineveh trust to their own magnanimity and bravery? Their hearts should sink and fail them: *They shall be hid*, shall abscond for shame, being in disgrace, abscond for fear, being in distress and danger, and not able to face the enemies, because of whose strength and terror, having no strength of their own, they shall *seek strength*, shall come sneaking to their neighbours to beg their assistance in a time of need. Thus God can cut off the spirit of princes, and take away their heart. 2. Did they depend upon their barrier, the garrisons and strongholds they had, which were regularly fortified and bravely manned? Those shall prove but paper-walls, and *like the first-ripe figs*, which, if you give the tree but a little shake, will *fall into the mouth of the eater* that gapes for them; so easily will all their strongholds be made to surrender to the advancing enemy, upon the first summons, v. 12. Note, Strongholds, even the strongest, are no fence against the judgments of God, when they come with commission. *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and a high wall*, but only in his own conceit, Prov. xviii. 10. They are supposed to make their strongholds as strong as possible, and are challenged to do their utmost to make them tenable, and serviceable to them against the invader (v. 14): *Draw thee water for the siege*; lay in great quantities of water, that that which is so necessary to the support of human life may not be wanting; it is put here for all manner of provision, with which Nineveh is ironically told to furnish herself, in expectation of a siege. "Take ever so much care that thou mayest not be starved out, and forced by famine to surrender, yet that shall not avail. *Fortify the strongholds*, by adding out-works to them, or putting men and arms into them," as with us by planting cannon upon them. "*Go into clay, and tread the mortar, and make strong the brick-kiln*"; take all the pains thou canst in erecting new fortifications; but it shall be all in vain, for (v. 15) there shall even the fire devour thee if the stronghold be burnt, or the sword cut thee off if it be taken by storm." It is by fire and sword that in time of war the great devastations are made. 3. Did they put confidence in the multitude of their inhabitants? Were they, from their number and valour, reckoned their strongest walls and fortifications? Alas! these shall stand them in no stead; they shall but sink the sooner under the weight of their own numbers (v. 13): *Thy people in the midst of thee*



are women; they have no wisdom, no courage; they shall be fickle, feeble, and faint-hearted, as women commonly are in such times of danger and distress; they shall be at their wits' end, adding to their griefs and fears by the power of their own imagination, and utterly unable to do any thing for themselves; the valiant men shall become cowards. *O verè Phrygiæ, neque enim Phryges—Phrygian dames, not Phrygian men.* Though they make themselves many (v. 15), as the canker-worm and as the locust, that come in vast swarms, though thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven, though thy exchange be thronged with wealthy traders, who, having so much money to stand up in defence of and so much to lay out in the means of their defence, should, one would think, give the enemy a warm reception, yet their hearts shall fail them too; though they be numerous as caterpillars, yet the fire and sword shall eat them up easily and irresistibly as the canker-worm, v. 15. They are as numerous as those wasting insects, but their enemies shall be mischievous like them. He adds (v. 16), *The canker-worm spoils, or spreads herself, and flies away.* Both the merchants and the enemies were compared to canker-worms. The enemies shall spoil Nineveh, and carry away the spoil, without opposition, or any hope of recovering it. Or the rich merchants, who have come from abroad to settle in Nineveh, and have raised vast estates there, out of which it was hoped they would contribute largely for the defence of the city, when they see the country invaded and the city likely to be besieged, will send away their effects, and remove to some other place, will spread their wings and fly away where they may be safe, and Nineveh shall be never the better for them. Note, It is rare to find even those that have shared with us in our joys willing to share with us in our griefs too. The canker-worms will continue upon the field while there is any thing to be had, but they are gone when all is gone. Those that men have got by they do not care to lose by. Nineveh's merchants bid her farewell in her distress. Riches themselves are as the canker-worms, which on a sudden fly away as the eagle towards heaven, Prov. xxiii. 5. 4. Did they put a confidence in the strength of their gates and bars? What fence will those be against the force of the judgments of God? v. 13. *The gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thy enemies,* the gates of thy rivers (ch. ii. 6), the flood-gates, or the passes and avenues, by which the enemy would make his entrance into the country, or the gates of the cities; these, though ever so strong and well-guarded, shall not answer their end: *The fire shall devour thy bars,* the bars of thy gates, and then they shall fly

open. 5. Did they put a confidence in their king and princes? They should do them no service (v. 17): *Thy crowned heads are as the locusts;* those that had pomp and power, as crowned heads, were enfeebled, and had no power to make resistance, when the enemy came in like a flood. *Thy captains,* that should lead thy forces into the field, are great indeed, and look great, but they are as the great grasshoppers, the *maximum quolisic—the largest specimens of that species;* still they are but grasshoppers, worthless things, that can do no service. *They encamp in the hedges, in the cold day,* the cold weather, but, when the sun arises, they flee away, and are gone, nobody knows whither. So these mercenary soldiers that lay slumbering about Nineveh, when any trouble arises, flee away, and shift for their own safety. *The hireling flees, because he is a hireling.* The king of Assyria is told, and it is a shame he needs to be told it (who might observe it himself), that *his shepherds slumber;* they have no life or spirit to appear for the flock, and are very remiss in the discharge of the duty of their place and the trust reposed in them: *Thy nobles shall dwell in the dust,* and be buried in silence. 6. Did they hope that they should yet recover themselves and rally again? In this also they should be disappointed; for, when the shepherds are smitten, the sheep are scattered; the people are dispersed upon the mountains and no mangathers them, nor will they ever come together of themselves, but will wander endlessly, as scattered sheep do. The judgment they are under is as a wound, and it is incurable; there is no relief for it, *no healing of thy bruise,* no possibility that the wound, which is so grievous and painful to thee, should be so much as skinned over; thy case is desperate (v. 19) and thy neighbours, instead of lending a hand to help thee, shall clap their hands over thee, and triumph in thy fall; and the reason is, because thou hast been one way or other injurious to them all: *Upon whom has not thy wickedness passed continually?* Thou hast been always doing mischief to those about thee; there is none of them but what thou hast abused and insulted; and therefore they shall be so far from pitying thee that they shall be glad to see thee reckoned with." Note, Those that have been abusive to their neighbours will, one time or another, find it come home to them; they are but preparing enemies to themselves against their day comes to fall: and those that dare not lay hands on them themselves will clap their hands over them, and upbraid them with their former wickedness, for which they are now well enough served and paid in their own coin. *The troublers shall be troubled* will be the burden of many, as it is here *the burden of Nineveh*



AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE PROPHECY OF  
H A B A K K U K.

IT is a very foolish fancy of some of the Jewish rabbin that this prophet was the son of the Shunamite woman that was at first miraculously given, and afterwards raised to life, by Elisha (2 Kings iv.), as they say also that the prophet Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, which Elijah raised to life. It is a more probable conjecture of their modern chronologers that he lived and prophesied in the reign of king Manasseh, when wickedness abounded, and destruction was hastening on, destruction by the Chaldeans, whom this prophet mentions as the instruments of God's judgments; and Manasseh was himself carried to Babylon, as an earnest of what should come afterwards. In the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon mention is made of Habakkuk the prophet in the land of Judah, who was carried thence by an angel to Babylon, to feed Daniel in the den; those who give credit to that story take pains to reconcile our prophet's living before the captivity, and foretelling it, with that. Huetius thinks that that was another of the same name, a prophet, this of the tribe of Simeon, that of Levi; others that he lived so long as to the end of the captivity, though he prophesied of it before it came. And some have imagined that Habakkuk's feeding Daniel in the den is to be understood mystically, that Daniel then *lived by faith*, as Habakkuk had said *the just should do*; he was *fed* by that word, Hab. ii. 4. The prophecy of this book is a mixture of the prophet's addresses to God in the people's name and to the people in God's name; for it is the office of the prophet to carry messages both ways. We have in it a lively representation of the intercourse and communion between a gracious God and a gracious soul. The whole refers particularly to the invasion of the land of Judah by the Chaldeans, which brought spoil upon the people of God, a just punishment of the spoil they had been guilty of among themselves; but it is of general use, especially to help us through that great temptation with which good men have in all ages been exercised, arising from the power and prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous by it.

CHAP. I.

In this chapter, I. The prophet complains to God of the violence done by the abuse of the sword of justice among his own people and the hardships thereby put upon many good people, ver. 1—4. II. God by him foretels the punishment of that abuse of power by the sword of war, and the desolations which the army of the Chaldeans should make upon them, ver. 5—11. III. Then the prophet complains of that too, and is grieved that the Chaldeans prevail so far (ver. 12—17), so that he scarcely knows which is more to be lamented, the sin or the punishment of it, for in both many harmless good people are very great sufferers. It is well that there is a day of judgment, and a future state, before us, in which it shall be eternally well with all the righteous, and with them only, and ill with all the wicked, and them only; so the present seeming disorders of Providence shall be set to rights, and there will remain no matter of complaint whatsoever.

**T**HE burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. 2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! *even* cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 3 Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are *that* raise up strife and contention.

4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

We are told no more in the title of this book (which we have, v. 1) than that the penman was a *prophet*, a man divinely inspired and commissioned, which is enough (if that be so, we need not ask concerning his tribe or family, or the place of his birth), and that the book itself is *the burden which he saw*; he was as sure of the truth of it as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes already accomplished. Here, in these verses, the prophet sadly laments the iniquity of the times, as one sensibly touched with grief for the lamentable decay of religion and righteousness. It is a very melancholy complaint which he here makes to God, I. That no

man could call what he had his own, but, in defiance of the most sacred laws of property and equity, he that had power on his side had what he had a mind to, though he had no right on his side: the land was *full of violence*, as the old world was, Gen. vi.

11. The prophet *cries out of violence* (v. 2), *iniquity and grievance, spoil and violence*. In families and among relations, in neighbourhoods and among friends, in commerce and in courts of law, every thing was carried with a high hand, and no man made any scruple of doing wrong to his neighbour, so that he could but make a good hand of it for himself. It does not appear that the prophet himself had any great wrong done him (in losing times it fared best with those that had nothing to lose), but it grieved him to see other people wronged, and he could not but mingle his tears with those of the oppressed. Note, Doing wrong to harmless people, as it is an iniquity in itself, so it is a great grievance to all that are concerned for God's Jerusalem, who *sigh and cry for abominations* of this kind. He complains (v. 4) that *the wicked doth compass about the righteous*. One honest man, one honest cause, shall have enemies besetting it on every side; many wicked men, in confederacy against it, run it down; nay, one wicked man (for it is singular) with so many various arts of mischief sets upon a righteous man, that he perfectly besets him. 2. That the kingdom was broken into parties and factions that were continually biting and devouring one another. This is a lamentation to all the sons of peace: *There are that raise up strife and contention* (v. 3), that foment divisions, widen breaches, incense men against one another, and sow discord among brethren, by doing the work of him that is the accuser of the brethren. Strifes and contentions that have been laid asleep, and begun to be forgotten, they awake, and industriously raise up again, and blow up the sparks that were hidden under the embers. And, if *blessed are the peace-makers*, cursed are such peace-breakers, that make parties, and so make mischief that spreads further, and lasts longer, than they can imagine. It is sad to see bad men warming their hands at those flames which are devouring all that is good in a nation, and stirring up the fire too. 3. That the torrent of violence and strife ran so strongly as to bid defiance to the restraints and regulations of laws and the administration of justice, v. 4. Because God did not appear against them, nobody else would; *therefore the law is slack*, is silent; it breathes not; *its pulse beats not* (so, it is said, the word signifies); it intermits, *and judgment does not go forth* as it should; no cognizance is taken of those crimes, no justice done upon the criminals; nay, *wrong judgment proceeds*; if appeals be made to the courts of equity, the righteous shall be condemned and the wicked justified, so that the remedy

proves the worst disease. The legislative power takes no care to supply the deficiencies of the law for the obviating of those growing threatening mischiefs; the executive power takes no care to answer the good intentions of the laws that are made; the stream of justice is dried up by violence, and has not its free course. 4. That all this was open and public, and impudently avowed; it was barefaced. The prophet complains that this iniquity was shown him; he *beheld it* which way soever he turned his eyes, nor could he look off it: *Spoiling and violence are before me*. Note, The abounding of wickedness in a nation is a very great eye-sore to good people, and, if they did not see it, they could not believe it to be so bad as it is. Solomon often complains of the vexation of this kind which he *saw under the sun*; and the prophet would therefore gladly turn hermit, that he might not see it, Jer. ix. 2. But *then we must needs go out of the world*, which therefore we should long to do, that we may remove to that world where holiness and love reign eternally, and no spoiling and violence shall be before us. 5. That he complained of this to God, but could not obtain a redress of those grievances: "*Lord,*" says he, "*why dost thou show me iniquity?*" Why hast thou cast my lot in a time and place when and where it is to be seen, and why do I continue to *sojourn in Mesech and Kedar?* *I cry to thee* of this violence; I cry aloud; I have cried long; but *thou wilt not hear, thou wilt not save*; thou dost not take vengeance on the oppressors, nor do justice to the oppressed, as if thy arm were shortened or thy ear heavy." When God seems to connive at the wickedness of the wicked, nay, and to countenance it, by suffering them to prosper in their wickedness, it shocks the faith of good men, and proves a sore temptation to them to say, *We have cleansed our hearts in vain* (Ps. lxxiii. 13), and hardens those in their impiety who say, *God has forsaken the earth*. We must not think it strange if wickedness be suffered to prevail far and prosper long. God has reasons, and we are sure they are good reasons, both for the reprovings of bad men and the rebukes of good men; and therefore, though we plead with him, and humbly expostulate concerning his judgments, yet we must say, "He is wise, and righteous, and good, in all," and must believe the day will come, though it may be long deferred, when the cry of sin will be heard against those that do wrong and the cry of prayer for those that suffer it.

5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for *I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you*. 6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, *that bitter and hasty*



nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places *that are* not their's. 7 They *are* terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. 8 Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle *that* hasteth to eat. 9 They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up *as* the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. 10 And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. 11 Then shall *his* mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, *imputing* this his power unto his god.

We have here an answer to the prophet's complaint, giving him assurance that, though God bore long, he would not bear always with this provoking people; for the day of vengeance was in his heart, and he must tell them so, that they might by repentance and reformation turn away the judgment they were threatened with.

I. The preamble to the sentence is very awful (v. 5): *Behold, you among the heathen, and regard.* Since they will not be brought to repentance by the long-suffering of God, he will take another course with them. No resentments are so keen, so deep, as those of abused patience. The Lord will inflict upon them, 1. A public punishment, which shall be beheld and regarded among the heathen, which the neighbouring nations shall take notice of and stand amazed at; see Deut. xxix. 24, 25. This will aggravate the desolations of Israel, that they will thereby be made a spectacle to the world. 2. An amazing punishment, so strange and surprising, and so much out of the common road of Providence, that it shall not be paralleled among the heathen, shall be sorer and heavier than what God has usually inflicted upon the nations that know him not; nay, it shall not be credited even by those that had the prediction of it from God before it comes, or the report of it from those that were eye-witnesses of it when it comes: *You will not believe it, though it be told you*; it will be thought incredible that so many judgments should combine in one, and every circumstance so strangely concur to enforce and aggravate it, that so great and potent a nation should be so reduced and broken,

and that God should deal so severely with a people that had been taken into the bond of the covenant and that he had done so much for. The punishment of God's professing people cannot but be the astonishment of all about them. 3. A speedy punishment: "*I will work a work in your days*, now quickly; this generation shall not pass till the judgment threatened be accomplished. The sins of former days shall be reckoned for in your days; for now the measure of the iniquity is full," Matt. xxiii. 36. 4. It shall be a punishment in which much of the hand of God shall appear; it shall be a work of his own working, so that all who see it shall say, *This is the Lord's doing*; and it will be found a fearful thing to fall into his hands; woe to those whom he takes to task! 5. It shall be such a punishment as will typify the destruction to be brought upon the despisers of Christ and his gospel, for to that these words are applied Acts xiii. 41. *Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish.* The ruin of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans for their idolatry was a figure of their ruin by the Romans for rejecting Christ and his gospel, and it is a very marvellous thing, and almost incredible. *Is there not a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?*

II. The sentence itself is very dreadful and particular (v. 6): *Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans.* There were those that raised up a great deal of strife and contention among them, which was their sin; and now God will raise up the Chaldeans against them, who shall strive and contend with them, which shall be their punishment. Note, When God's professing people quarrel among themselves, snarl at, and devour one another, it is just with God to bring the common enemy upon them, that shall make peace by making a universal devastation. The contending parties in Jerusalem were inveterate one against another, when the Romans came and *took away their place and nation.* The Chaldeans shall be the instruments of the destruction threatened, and, though themselves acting unrighteously, they shall *execute the righteousness of the Lord* and punish the unrighteousness of Israel. Now here we have,

1. A description of the people that shall be raised up against Israel, to be a scourge to them. (1.) They are a *bitter and hasty nation*, cruel and fierce, and what they do is done with violence and fury; they are precipitate in their counsels, vehement in their passions, and push on with resolution in their enterprises; they show no mercy and they spare no pains. Miserable is the case of those that are given up into the hand of these cruel ones. (2.) They are strong, and therefore formidable, and such as there is no standing before, and yet no fleeing from (v. 7): *They are terrible and dreadful*, famed for the gallant troops they bring into the field (v. 8); *their horses are swifter than leopards*

to charge and pursue, and *more fierce* than the *evening wolves*; and wolves are observed to be the most ravenous towards the evening, after they have been kept hungry all day, waiting for that darkness under the protection of which *all the beasts of the forest creep forth*, Ps. civ. 20. Their squadrons of horse shall be very numerous: "*Their horsemen shall spread themselves* a great way, for they shall *come from far*, from all parts of their own country, and shall be dispersed into all parts of the country they invade, to plunder it, and enrich themselves with the spoil of it. And, *in making speed to spoil, they shall hasten to the prey* (as those, Isa. viii. 1, *margin*), for they shall *fly as the eagle* towards the earth when she *hastens to eat*, and strikes at the prey she has an eye upon." (3.) Their own will is a law to them, and, in the fierceness of their pursuits, they will not be governed by any laws of humanity, equity, or honour: *Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves*, v. 7. Appetite and passion rule them, and not reason nor conscience. Their principle is, *Quicquid libet, licet—My will is my law*. And, *Sic volo, sic jubeo; stat pro ratione voluntas—This is my wish, this is my command; it shall be done because I choose it*. What favour can be hoped for from such an enemy? Note, Those who have been unjust and unmerciful, among whom *the law is slackened, and judgment doth not go forth*, will justly be paid in their own coin and fall into the hands of those who will deal unjustly and unmercifully with them.

2. A prophecy of the terrible execution that shall be made by this terrible nation: *They shall march through the breadth of the earth* (so it may be read); for in a little time the Chaldean forces subdued all the nations in those parts, so that they seemed to have conquered the world; they overran Asia and part of Africa. Or, through the breadth of the land of Israel, which was wholly laid waste by them. It is here foretold, (1.) That they shall seize all as their own that they can lay their hands on. They shall come to *possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs*, which they have no right to, but that which their sword gives them. (2.) That they shall push on the war with all possible vigour: *They shall all come for violence* (v. 9), not to determine any disputed right by the sword, but, right or wrong, to enrich themselves with the spoil. *Their faces shall sup up as the east wind*; their very countenances shall be so fierce and frightful that a look will serve to make them masters of all they have a mind to; so that they shall *swallow up* all, as the east wind nips and blasts the buds and flowers. *Their faces shall look towards the east* (so some read it); they shall still have an eye to their own country, which lay eastward from Judea, and all the spoil they seize they shall remit thither. (3.) That they shall take a vast

number of prisoners, and send them into Babylon: *They shall gather the captivity as the sand for multitude*, and shall never know when they have enough, as long as there are any more to be had. (4.) That they shall make nothing of the opposition that is given to them, v. 10. Do the distressed Jews depend upon their great men to make a stand, and with their wisdom and courage to give check to the victorious arms of the Chaldeans? Alas! they will make nothing of them. *They shall scoff* (he shall, so it is in the original, meaning Nebuchadnezzar, who, being puffed up with his successes, shall scoff) *at the kings and commanders of the forces that think to make head against him; and the princes shall be a scorn to them*, so unequal a match shall they appear to be. Do they depend upon their garrisons and fortified towns? *He shall deride every stronghold*, for to him it shall be weak, and *he shall heap dust, and take it*; a little soil, thrown up for ramparts, shall serve to give him all the advantage against them that he can desire; he shall make but a jest of them, and a sport of taking them. (5.) By all this he shall be puffed up with an intolerable pride, which shall be his destruction (v. 11): *Then shall his mind change for the worse*. The spirit both of the people and of the king shall grow more haughty and insolent. Those that will not be content with their own rights will not be content when they have made themselves masters of other people's rights too; but as the condition rises the mind rises too. This victorious king shall *pass over* all the bounds of reason, equity, and modesty, and break through all their bonds, and thereby *he shall offend*, shall make God his enemy, and so prepare ruin for himself by *imputing this his power to his god*, whereas he had it from the God of Israel. *Bel* and *Nebo* were the gods of the Chaldeans, and to them they gave the glory of their successes; they were hardened in their idolatry, and blasphemously argued that because they had conquered Israel their gods were too strong for the God of Israel. Note, It is a great offence (and the common offence of proud people) to take that glory to ourselves, or to give it to gods of our own making, which is due to the living and true God only. These closing words of the sentence give a glimpse of comfort to the afflicted people of God; it is to be hoped that they will change their minds, and grow better, and ripen for deliverance; and they did so. However, their enemies will change their minds, and grow worse, and ripen for destruction, which will inevitably come in God's due time; for a haughty spirit, lifted up against God, *goes before a fall*.

12 *Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O*



mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. 13 *Thou art* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, *and* holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth *the man that is* more righteous than he? 14 And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, *that have* no ruler over them? 15 They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. 16 Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion *is* fat, and their meat plenteous. 17 Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

The prophet, having received of the Lord that which he was to deliver to the people, now turns to God, and again addresses himself to him for the ease of his own mind under the burden which he saw. And still he is full of complaints. If he look about him, he sees nothing but violence done by Israel; if he look before him, he sees nothing but violence done against Israel; and it is hard to say which is the more melancholy sight. His thoughts of both he pours out before the Lord. It is our duty to be affected both with the iniquities and with the calamities of the church of God and of the times and places wherein we live; but we must take heed lest we grow peevish in our resentments, and carry them too far, so as to entertain any hard thoughts of God, or lose the comfort of our communion with him. The world is bad, and always was so, and will be so; it is out of our power to mend it; but we are sure that God governs the world, and will bring glory to himself out of all, and therefore we must resolve to make the best of it, must be ourselves better, and long for the better world. The prospect of the prevalence of the Chaldeans drives the prophet to his knees, and he takes the liberty to plead with God concerning it. In his plea we may observe,

I. The truths which he lays down, which he resolves to abide by, and with which he endeavours to comfort himself and his friends, under the growing threatening power of the Chaldeans; and they will furnish us with pleasing considerations for our support in the like case.

1. However it be, yet God is *the Lord our God, and our Holy One*. The victorious Chaldeans impute their power to their idols, but we are taught to tell them that the God

of Israel is *the true God, the living God*, Jer. x. 10, 11. (1.) He is *Jehovah*, the fountain of all being, power, and perfection. *Our rock is not as theirs*. (2.) "*He is my God*." He speaks in the people's name; every Israelite may say, "*He is mine*." Though we are thus sore broken, and *all h s come upon us, yet have we not forgotten the name of our God*, nor quitted our relation to him, yet have we not disowned him, nor hath he disowned us, Ps. xliv. 17. We are an offending people; he is an offended God; yet he is ours, and we will not entertain any hard thoughts of him, nor of his service, for all this." (3.) "*He is my Holy One*." This intimates that the prophet loved God as a holy God, loved him for the sake of his holiness. "*He is mine* because he is a *Holy One*; and therefore he will be my sanctifier and my Saviour, because he is my *Holy One*. Men are unholy, but my God is holy."

2. Our God is from everlasting. This he pleads with him. *Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God?* It is matter of great and continual comfort to God's people, under the troubles of this present life, that their God is from everlasting. This intimates, (1.) The eternity of his nature; if he is from everlasting, he will be to everlasting, and we must have recourse to this first principle, when things seen, which are temporal, are discouraging, that we have hope and help sufficient in a God that is not seen, that is eternal. "*Art thou not from everlasting, and then wilt thou not make bare thy everlasting arm, in pursuance of thy everlasting counsels, to make unto thyself an everlasting name?*" (2.) The antiquity of his covenant: "*Art thou not from of old, a God in covenant with thy people*" (so some understand it), "*and hast thou not done great things for them in the days of old, which we have heard with our ears, and which our fathers have told us of; and art thou not the same God still that thou ever wast? Thou art God, and changest not*."

3. While the world stands God will have a church in it. Thou art from everlasting, and then *we shall not die*. The Israel of God shall not be extirpated, nor the name of Israel blotted out, though it may sometimes seem to be very near it; like the apostles (2 Cor. vi. 9), *chastened, and not killed; chastened sorely, but not delivered over to death*, Ps. cxviii. 18. See how the prophet infers the perpetuity of the church from the eternity of God; for Christ has said, *Because I live, and therefore as long as I live, you shall live also*, John xiv. 19. He is the rock on which the church is so firmly built that the *gates of hell shall not, cannot, prevail against it*. *We shall not die*.

4. Whatever the enemies of the church may do against her, it is according to the counsel of God, and is designed and directed for wise and holy ends: *Thou hast ordained them; thou hast established them*. It was

God that gave the Chaldeans their power, made them a formidable people, and in his counsel determined what they should do, nor had they any power against his Israel but what was *given them from above*. He gave them their commission to *take the spoil and to take the prey*, Isa. x. 6. Herein God appears a mighty God, that the power of mighty men is derived from him, depends upon him, and is under his check; he says concerning it, *Hitherto shall it come, and no further*. Those whom God ordains shall do no more than what God has ordained, which is a great comfort to God's suffering people. Men are God's hand, the rod in his hand, Ps. xvii. 14. And he has *ordained them for judgment, and for correction*. God's people need correction, and deserve it; they must expect it; they shall have it; when wicked men are let loose against them, it is not for their destruction, that they may be ruined, but for their correction, that they may be reformed; they are not intended for a sword, to cut them off, but for a rod, to drive out the foolishness that is found in their hearts, though they *mean not so, neither does their heart think so*, Isa. x. 7. Note, It is matter of great comfort to us, in reference to the troubles and afflictions of the church, that, whatever mischief men design to them, God designs to bring good out of them, and we are sure that *his counsel shall stand*.

5. Though the wickedness of the wicked may prosper for a while, yet God is a holy God, and does not approve of that wickedness (v. 13): *Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*. The prophet, observing how very vicious and impious the Chaldeans were, and yet what great success they had against God's Israel, found a temptation arising from it to say that it was vain to serve God, and that it was indifferent to him what men were. But he soon suppresses the thought, by having recourse to his first principle, That God is not, that he cannot be, the author or patron of sin; as he cannot do iniquity himself, so he is of *purer eyes than to behold it* with any allowance or approbation; no, it is that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*. He sees all the sin that is committed in the world, and it is an offence to him, it is odious in his eyes, and those that commit it are thereby made obnoxious to his justice. There is in the nature of God an antipathy to those dispositions and practices that are contrary to his holy law; and, though an expedient is happily found out for his being reconciled to sinners, yet he never will, nor can, be reconciled to sin. And this principle we must resolve to abide by, though the dispensations of his providence may for a time, and in some instances, seem to be inconsistent with it. Note, God's connivance at sin must never be interpreted into a giving countenance to it; for *he is not a God that has pleasure in wickedness*, Ps. v. 4, 5. The iniquity which, it is here said, God does not look upon, may be

meant especially of the mischief done to God's people by their persecutors; though God sees cause to permit it, yet he does not approve of it; so it agrees with that of Balaam (Num. xxiii. 21), *He has not beheld iniquity against Jacob, nor seen, with allowance, perverseness against Israel*, which is very comfortable to the people of God, in their afflictions by the rage of men, that they cannot infer God's anger from it; though the instruments of their trouble hate them, it does not therefore follow that God does; nay, he loves them, and it is in love that he corrects them.

II. The grievances he complains of, and finds hard to reconcile with these truths: "Since we are sure that thou art a holy God, why have atheists temptation given them to question whether thou art so or no? *Wherefore lookest thou upon the Chaldeans that deal treacherously with thy people, and givest them success in their attempts upon us?* Why dost thou suffer thy sworn enemies, who blaspheme thy name, to deal thus cruelly, thus perfidiously, with thy sworn subjects, who desire to fear thy name? What shall we say to this?" This was a temptation to Job (*ch. xxi. 7; xxiv. 1*), to David (*Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3*), to Jeremiah, *ch. xii. 1, 2*. 1. That God permitted sin, and was patient with the sinners. He *looked upon them*; he saw all their wicked doings and designs, and did not restrain nor punish them, but suffered them to speed in their purposes, to go on and prosper, and to carry all before them. Nay, his looking upon them intimates that he not only gave them no check or rebuke, but that he gave them encouragement and assistance, as if he smiled upon them and favoured them. He *held his tongue* when they went on in their wicked courses, said nothing against them, gave no orders to stop them. *These things thou hast done, and I kept silence*. 2. That his patience was abused, and, *because sentence against these evil works and workers was not executed speedily*, therefore *their hearts were the more fully set in them to do evil*. (1.) They were false and deceitful, and there was no credit to be given them, nor any confidence to be put in them. They deal *treacherously*; under colour of peace and friendship, they prosecute and execute the most mischievous designs, and make no conscience of their word in any thing. (2.) They hated and persecuted men because they were better than themselves, as Cain hated Abel because *his own works were evil and his brother's righteous*. The wicked *decours the man that is more righteous than he*, for that very reason, because he shames him; they have an ill will to the image of God, and therefore devour good men, because they bear that image. Though many of the Jews were as bad as the Chaldeans themselves, and worse, yet there were those among them that were much more righteous, and yet were devoured by them. (3.) They made no



more of killing men than of catching fish. The prophet complains that, Providence having delivered up the weaker to be a prey to the stronger, they were, in effect, made as the fishes of the sea, v. 14. So they had been among themselves, preying upon one another as the greater fishes do upon the less (v. 3), and they were made so to the common enemy. They were as the creeping things, or swimming things (for the word is used for fish, Gen. i. 20), that have no ruler over them, either to restrain them from devouring one another or to protect them from being devoured by their enemies. They are given up to the Chaldeans as fish to the fishermen. Those proud oppressors make no conscience of killing them, any more than men do of pulling fish out of the water, so small account do they make of human lives. They make no difficulty of killing them, but do it with as much ease as men catch fish, that make no resistance, but are unguarded and unarmed, and it is rather a pastime than any pains to take them. They make no distinction among them, but all is fish that comes to their net; and they reckon every thing their own that they can lay their hands on. They have various ways of spoiling and destroying, as men have of taking fish. Some they take up with the angle (v. 15), one by one; others they catch in shoals, and by wholesale, in their net, and gather them in their drag, their enclosing net. Such variety of methods have they to destroy those by whom they hope to enrich themselves. (4.) They gloried in what they got, and pleased themselves with it, though it was got dishonestly: *Their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous*; they prosper in their oppression and fraud; they have a great deal, and it is of the best; their land is good, and they have abundance of it. And therefore, [1.] They have great complacency in themselves, and are very pleasant; they live merrily (v. 15): *Therefore they rejoice and are glad*, because their wealth is great, and their projects succeed for the increase of it, Job xxxi. 25. *Soul, take thy ease*, Luke xii. 19. [2.] They have a great conceit of themselves, are very much in love with themselves, and are great admirers of their own ingenuity and management: *They sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag*; they applaud themselves for having got so much money, though ever so dishonestly. Note, There is a proneness in us to take the glory of our outward prosperity to ourselves, and to say, *My might, and the power of my hands, have gotten me this wealth*, Deut. viii. 17. This is idolizing ourselves, sacrificing to the drag-net, because it is our own, which is as absurd a piece of idolatry as sacrificing to Neptune or Dagon. That which makes them adore their net thus is because by it *their portion is fat*. Those that make a god of their money will make a god of their drag-net, if they can but get money by it.

III. The prophet, in the close, humbly expresses his hope that God will not suffer these destroyers of mankind always to go on and prosper thus, and expostulates with God concerning it (v. 17): "*Shall they therefore empty their net?*" Shall they enrich themselves, and fill their own vessels, with that which they have by violence and oppression taken away from their neighbours? Shall they empty their net of what they have caught, that they may cast it into the sea again, to catch more? And wilt thou suffer them to proceed in this wicked course? Shall they not spare continually to slay the nations? Must the numbers and wealth of nations be sacrificed to their net? As if it were a small thing to rob men of their estates, shall they rob God of his glory? Is not God the king of nations, and will he not assert their injured rights? Is he not jealous for his own honour, and will he not maintain that?" The prophet lodges the matter in God's hand, and leaves it with him, as the psalmist does. Ps. lxxiv. 22, *Arise, O God! plead thy own cause*.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have an answer expected by the prophet (ver. 1), and returned by the Spirit of God, to the complaints which the prophet made of the violence and victories of the Chaldeans in the close of the foregoing chapter. The answer is, I. That after God has served his own purposes by the prevailing power of the Chaldeans, has tried the faith and patience of his people, and distinguished between the hypocrites and the sincere among them, he will reckon with the Chaldeans, will humble and bring down, not only that proud monarch Nebuchadnezzar, but that proud monarchy, for their boundless and insatiable thirst after dominion and wealth, for which they themselves should at length be made a prey, ver. 2—8. II. That not they only, but all other sinners like them, should perish under a divine woe. 1. Those that are covetous, are greedy of wealth and honours, ver. 9, 11. 2. Those that are injurious and oppressive, and raise estates by wrong and rapine, ver. 12—14. 3. Those that promote drunkenness that they may expose their neighbours to shame, ver. 15—17. 4. Those that worship idols, ver. 18—20.

**I** WILL stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. 2 And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. 4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Here, I. The prophet humbly gives his attendance upon God (v. 1): "*I will stand upon my watch*, as a sentinel on the walls of a besieged city, or on the borders of an invaded country, that is very solicitous to gain intelligence. I will look up, will look round, will look within, and watch to see what he will say unto me, will listen attentively to the words of his mouth and carefully observe the steps of his providence, that I may not

lose the least hint of instruction or direction. *I will watch to see what he will say in me*" (so it may be read), "what the Spirit of prophecy in me will dictate to me, by way of answer to my complaints." Even in an ordinary way, God not only speaks to us by his word, but speaks in us by our own consciences, whispering to us, *This is the way, walk in it*; and we must attend to the voice of God in both. The prophet's standing upon his tower, or high place, intimates his prudence, in making use of the helps and means he had within his reach to know the mind of God, and to be instructed concerning it. Those that expect to hear from God must withdraw from the world, and get above it, must raise their attention, fix their thought, study the scriptures, consult experiences and the experienced, continue instant in prayer, and thus set themselves upon the tower. His standing upon his watch intimates his patience, his constancy and resolution; he will wait the time, and weather the point, as a watchman does, but he will have an answer; he will know what God will say to him, not only for his own satisfaction, but to enable him as a prophet to give satisfaction to others, and answer their exceptions, when he is reprov'd or argued with. Herein the prophet is an example to us. 1. When we are tossed and perplexed with doubts concerning the methods of Providence, are tempted to think that it is fate, or fortune, and not a wise God, that governs the world, or that the church is abandoned, and God's covenant with his people cancelled and laid aside, then we must take pains to furnish ourselves with considerations proper to clear this matter; we must stand upon our watch against the temptation, that it may not get ground upon us, must set ourselves upon the tower, to see if we can discover that which will silence the temptation and solve the objected difficulties, must do as the psalmist, *consider the days of old and make a diligent search* (Ps. lxxvii. 6), must go into the sanctuary of God, and there labour to understand the end of these things (Ps. lxxiii. 17); we must not give way to our doubts, but struggle to make the best of our way out of them. 2. When we have been at prayer, pouring out our complaints and requests before God, we must carefully observe what answers God gives by his word, his Spirit, and his providences, to our humble representations; when David says, *I will direct my prayer unto thee*, as an arrow to the mark, he adds, *I will look up*, will look after my prayer, as a man does after the arrow he has shot, Ps. v. 3. We must hear what God the Lord will speak, Ps. lxxxv. 5. 3. When we go to read and hear the word of God, and so to consult the lively oracles, we must set ourselves to observe what God will thereby say unto us, to suit our case, what word of conviction, caution, counsel, and comfort, he

will bring to our souls, that we may receive it, and submit to the power of it, and may consider what we shall answer, what returns we shall make to the word of God, when we are reprov'd by it. 4. When we are attacked by such as quarrel with God and his providence as the prophet here seems to have been—beset, besieged, as in a tower, by hosts of objectors—we should consider how to answer them, fetch our instructions from God, hear what he says to us for our satisfaction, and have that ready to say to others, *when we are reprov'd*, to satisfy them, as a *reason of the hope that is in us* (1 Pet. iii. 15), and beg of God *a mouth and wisdom*, and that it may be given us *in that same hour what we shall speak*.

II. God graciously gives him the meeting; for he will not disappoint the believing expectations of his people that wait to hear what he will say unto them, but will *speak peace*, will answer them with good words and comfortable words, Zech. i. 13. The prophet had complained of the prevalence of the Chaldeans, which God had given him a prospect of; now, to pacify him concerning it, he here gives him a further prospect of their fall and ruin, as Isaiah, before this, when he had foretold the captivity in Babylon, foretold also the destruction of Babylon. Now, this great and important event being made known to him by a vision, care is taken to publish the vision, and transmit it to the generations to come, who should see the accomplishment of it.

1. The prophet must *write the vision*, v. 2. Thus, when St. John had a vision of the New Jerusalem, he was ordered to *write*, Rev. xxi. 5. He must write it, that he might imprint it on his own mind, and make it more clear to himself, but especially that it might be notified to those in distant places, and transmitted to those in future ages. What is handed down by tradition is easily mistaken and liable to corruption; but what is written is reduced to a certainty, and preserved safe and pure. We have reason to bless God for written visions, that God has written to us the great things of his prophets as well as of his law. He must *write the vision*, and make it plain upon tables, must write it legibly, in large characters, so that *he who runs may read it*, that those who will not allow themselves leisure to read it deliberately may not avoid a cursory view of it. Probably, the prophets were wont to write some of the most remarkable of their predictions in tables, and to hang them up in the temple, Isa. viii. 1. Now the prophet is told to *write this very plain*. Note, Those who are employed in preaching the word of God should study plainness as much as may be, so as to make themselves intelligible to the meanest capacities. The things of our everlasting peace, which God has written to us, are made plain, *they are all plain to him that understands* (Prov. viii. 9), and they are pub-



lished with authority; God himself has prefixed his *imprimatur* to them; he has said, *Make them plain*.

2. The people must wait for the accomplishment of the *vision* (v. 3): "*The vision is yet for an appointed time to come*. You shall now be told of your deliverance by the breaking of the Chaldeans' power, and that the time of it is fixed in the counsel and decree of God. *There is an appointed time*, but it is not near; it is yet to be deferred a great while;" and that comes in here as a reason why it must be written, that it may be reviewed afterwards and the event compared with it. Note, God has an appointed time for his appointed work, and will be sure to do the work when the time comes; it is not for us to anticipate his appointments, but to wait his time. And it is a great encouragement to wait with patience, that, though the promised favour be deferred long, it will come at last, and be an abundant recompence to us for our waiting: *At the end it shall speak and not lie*. We shall not be disappointed of it, for it will come at the time appointed; nor shall we be disappointed in it, for it will fully answer our believing expectations. The promise may seem silent a great while, but at the end it shall speak; and therefore, *though it tarry* longer than we expected, yet we must continue *waiting for it*; being assured it will come, and willing to tarry until it does come. The day that God has set for the deliverance of his people, and the destruction of his and their enemies, is a day, (1.) That will surely come at last; it is never adjourned *sine die*—without fixing another day, but it will without fail come at the fixed time and the fittest time. (2.) It will not tarry, for God is not slack, as some count slackness (2 Pet. iii. 9); *though it tarry* past our time, yet it does not tarry past God's time, which is always the best time.

3. This vision, the accomplishment of which is so long waited for, will be such an exercise of faith and patience as will try and discover men what they are, v. 4. (1.) There are some who will proudly disdain this vision, whose hearts are so lifted up that they scorn to take notice of it; if God will work for them immediately, they will thank him, but they will not give him credit; their hearts are lifted up towards vanity, and, since God puts them off, they will shift for themselves and not be beholden to him; they think *their own hands sufficient for them*, and God's promise is to them an insignificant thing. That man's soul that is thus *lifted up is not upright in him*; it is not right with God, is not as it should be. Those that either distrust or despise God's all-sufficiency will not walk uprightly with him, Gen. xvii. 1. But, (2.) Those who are truly good, and whose hearts are upright with God, will value the promise, and venture their all upon it; and, in confidence of the truth of it, will keep close to God and duty in the most difficult trying

times, and will then live comfortably in communion with God, dependence on him, and expectation of him. *The just shall live by faith*; during the captivity good people shall support themselves, and live comfortably, by faith in these precious promises, while the performance of them is deferred. *The just shall live by his faith*, by that faith which he acts upon the word of God. This is quoted in the New Testament (Rom. i. 17, Gal. iii. 11. Heb. x. 38), for the proof of the great doctrine of justification by faith only and of the influence which the grace of faith has upon the Christian life. Those that are made *just by faith shall live*, shall be happy here and for ever; while they are here, they live by it; when they come to heaven faith shall be swallowed up in vision.

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, *he is* a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and *is* as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people: 6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth *that which is* not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! 7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? 8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. 9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! 10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned *against* thy soul. 11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. 12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! 13 Behold, *is it* not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? 14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The prophet having had orders to *write the vision*, and the people to wait for the accomplishment of it, the vision itself follows; and it is, as divers other prophecies we have met with, the burden of Babylon and Babylon's king, the same that was said to *pass over and offend*, ch. i. 11. It reads the doom, some think, of Nebuchadnezzar, who was principally active in the destruction of Jerusalem, or of that monarchy, or of the whole kingdom of the Chaldeans, or of all such proud and oppressive powers as bear hard upon any people, especially upon God's people. Observe,

I. The charge laid down against this enemy, upon which the sentence is grounded, v. 5. *The lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life*, are the entangling snares of men, and great men especially; and we find him that led Israel captive himself led captive by each of these. For, 1. He is sensual and voluptuous, and given to his pleasures: *He transgresses by wine*. Drunkenness is itself a transgression, and is the cause of abundance of transgression. We read of those that *err through wine*, Isa. xxviii. 7. Belshazzar (in whom particularly this prophecy had its accomplishment) was in the height of his transgression by wine when the hand-writing upon the wall signed the warrant for his immediate execution, pursuant to this sentence, Dan. v. 1. 2. He is haughty and imperious: *He is a proud man*, and his pride is a certain presage of his fall coming on. If great men be proud men, the great God will make them know he is above them. His transgressing by wine is made the cause of his arrogance and insolence: therefore *he is a proud man*. When a man is drunk, though he makes himself as mean as a beast, yet he thinks himself as great as a king, and prides himself in that by which he shames himself. We find *the crown of pride* upon the head of the *drunkards of Ephraim*, and a *woe* to both, Isa. xxviii. 1. 3. He is covetous and greedy of wealth, and this is the effect of his pride; he thinks himself worthy to enjoy all, and therefore makes it his business to engross all. The Chaldean monarchy aimed to be a universal one. He *keeps not at home*, is not content with his own, which he has an incontestable title to, but thinks it too little, and so enjoys it not, nor takes the comfort he might in his own palace, in his own dominion. His sin is his punishment, his ambition is his perpetual uneasiness. Though the home be a palace, yet to a discontented mind it is a prison. He *enlarges his desire as hell, or the grave*, which daily receives the body of the dead, and yet still cries, *Give, give*; he is *as death*, which continues to devour, and *cannot be satisfied*. Note, It is the sin and folly of many who have a great deal of the wealth of this world that they do not know when they have enough, but the more they have the more they would have, and the more eager they

are for it. And it is just with God that the desires which are insatiable should still be unsatisfied; it is the doom passed on those that *love silver* that they shall never be *satisfied with it*, Eccl. v. 10. Those that will not be content with their allotments shall not have the comfort of their achievements. This proud prince is still *gathering to him all nations, and heaping to him all people*, invading their rights, seizing their properties, and they must not be unless they will be his, and under his command. One nation will not satisfy him unless he has another, and then another, and all at last; as those in a lower sphere, to gratify the same inordinate desire, *lay house to house, and field to field, that they may be placed alone in the earth*, Isa. v. 8. And it is hard to say which is more to be pitied, the folly of such ambitious princes as place their honour in enlarging their dominions, and not in ruling them well, or the misery of those nations that are harassed and pulled to pieces by them.

II. The sentence passed upon him (v. 6): *Shall not all these take up a parable against him?* His doom is,

1. That, since pride has been his sin, disgrace and dishonour shall be his punishment, and he shall be loaded with contempt, shall be laughed at and despised by all about him, as those that look big, and aim high, deserve to be, and commonly are, when they are brought down and baffled.

2. That, since he has been abusive to his neighbours, those very persons whom he has abused shall be the instruments of his disgrace: *All those shall take up a taunting proverb against him*. They shall have the pleasure of insulting over him and he the shame of being trampled upon by them. Those that shall triumph in the fall of this great tyrant are here furnished with a *parable*, and a *taunting proverb*, to take up against him. *He shall say* (he that draws up the insulting ditty shall say thus), *Ho, he that increases that which is not his! Aha! what has become of him now?* So it may be read in a taunting way. Or, *He shall say*, that is, the *just*, who *lives by his faith*, he to whom the vision is written and made plain, with the help of that shall say this, shall foretell the enemy's fall, even when he sees him flourishing, and *suddenly curse his habitation*, even when he is *taking root*, Job v. 3. He shall indeed denounce woes against him.

(1.) Here is a woe against him for increasing his own possessions by invading his neighbour's rights, v. 6—8. He *increases that which is not his*, but other people's. Note, No more of what we have is to be reckoned ours than what we came honestly by; nor will it long be ours, for *wealth gotten by vanity will be diminished*. Let not those that thrive in the world be too forward to bless themselves in it, for, if they do not thrive lawfully, they are under a woe. See here, [1.] What this prosperous prince is



doing; he is *lading himself with thick clay*. Riches are but clay, thick clay; what are gold and silver but white and yellow earth? Those that travel through thick clay are both retarded and dirtied in their journey; so are those that go through the world in the midst of an abundance of the wealth of it; but, as if that were not enough, what fools are those that *load themselves with it*, as if this trash would be their treasure! They burden themselves with continual care about it, with a great deal of guilt in getting, saving, and spending it, and with a heavy account which they must give of it another day. They overload their ship with this thick clay, and so sink it and themselves *into destruction and perdition*. [2.] See what people say of him, while he is thus increasing his wealth; they cry, "*How long? How long will it be ere he has enough?*" They cry to God, "*How long wilt thou suffer this proud oppressor to trouble the nations?*" Or they say to one another, "*See how long it will last, how long he will be able to keep what he gets thus dishonestly.*" They dare not speak out, but we know what they mean when they say, *How long?* [3.] See what will be in the end hereof. What he has got by violence from others, others shall take by violence from him. The Medes and Persians shall make a prey of the Chaldeans, as they have done of other nations, *v. 7, 8*. "*There shall be those that will bite thee and vex thee; those from whom thou didst not fear any danger, that seemed asleep, shall rise up and awake to be a plague to thee.*" They shall rise up suddenly when thou art most secure, and least prepared to receive the shock and ward off the blow. *Shall they not rise up suddenly?* No doubt they shall, and thou thyself hast reason to expect it, to be dealt with as thou hast dealt with others, that *thou shalt be for booties unto them*, as others have been unto thee, that, according to the law of retaliation, as *thou hast spoiled many nations* so thou shalt thyself be *spoiled* (*v. 8*); *all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee*." The king of Babylon thought he had brought all the nations round about him so low that none of them would be able to make reprisals upon him; but though they were but a remnant of people, a very few left, yet these shall be sufficient to spoil him, when God has such a controversy with him, *First*, For *men's blood*, and the thousands of lives that have been sacrificed to his ambition and revenge, especially for the blood of Israelites, which is in a special manner precious to God. *Secondly*, For *the violence of the land*, his laying waste so many countries, and destroying the fruits of the earth, especially in the land of Israel. *Thirdly*, For *the violence of the city*, the many cities that he had turned into ruinous heaps, especially Jerusalem the holy city, and of *all that dwell therein*, who were ruined by him. Note, The violence done by proud men to advance

and enrich themselves will be called over again (and must be accounted for) another day, by him *to whom vengeance belongs*.

(2.) Here is a woe against him for coveting still more, and aiming to be still higher, *v. 9—11*. The crime for which this woe is denounced is much the same with that in the foregoing article—an insatiable desire of wealth and honour; it is *coveting an evil covetousness to his house*, that is, grasping at an abundance for his family. Note, Covetousness is a very evil thing in a family; it brings disquiet and uneasiness into it (*he that is greedy of gain troubles his own house*), and, which is worse, it brings the curse of God upon it and upon all the affairs of it. *Woe to him that gains an evil gain*; so the margin reads it. There is a lawful gain, which by the blessing of God may be a comfort to a house (*a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children*), but what is got by fraud and injustice is ill-got, and will be poor gain, will not only do no good to a family, but will bring poverty and ruin upon it. Now observe, [1.] What this covetous wretch aims at; it is *to set his nest on high*, to raise his family to some greater dignity than it had before arrived at, or to set it, as he apprehends, out of the reach of danger, that he may be *delivered from the power of evil*, that it may not be in the power of the worst of his enemies to do him a mischief nor so much as to disturb his repose. Note, It is common for men to pretend it as an excuse for their covetousness and ambition that they only consult their own safety, and aim to secure themselves; and yet they do but deceive themselves when they think *their wealth* will be a *strong city* to them, and a *high wall*, for it is so only in *their own conceit*, *Prov. xviii. 11*. [2.] What he will get by it: *Thou hast consulted*, not safety, but *shame, to thy house, by cutting off many people*, *v. 10*. Note, An estate raised by iniquity is a scandal to a family. Those that cut off, or undermine, others, to make room for themselves, that impoverish others to enrich themselves, do but consult shame to their houses, and fasten upon them a mark of infamy. Yet that is not the worst of it: "*Thou hast sinned against thy own soul*, hast brought that under guilt and wrath, and endangered that." Note, Those that do wrong to their neighbour do a much greater wrong to their own souls. But if the sinner pleads, Not guilty, and thinks he has managed his frauds and violence with so much art and contrivance that they cannot be proved upon him, let him know that if there be no other witnesses against him *the stone shall cry out of the wall* against him, and *the beam out of the timber in the roof shall answer it*, shall second it, shall witness it, that the money and materials wherewith he built the house were unjustly gotten, *v. 11*. The stones and timber cry to heaven for vengeance, as *the whole creation groans under*

the sin of man and waits to be delivered from that *bondage of corruption*.

(3.) Here is a woe against him for building a town and a city by blood and extortion (v. 12): *He builds a town*, and is himself lord of it; *he establishes a city*, and makes it his royal seat. So Nebuchadnezzar did (Dan. iv. 30): *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom?* But it is built with the blood of his own subjects, whom he has oppressed, and the blood of his neighbours, whom he has unjustly invaded; it is *established by iniquity*, by the unrighteous laws that are made for the security of it. *Woe* to him that does so; for the towns and cities thus built can never be established; they will fall, and their founders be buried in the ruins of them. Babylon, which was built by blood and iniquity, did not continue long; its day soon came to fall; and then this woe took effect, when that prophecy, which is expressed as a history (Isa. xxi. 9), proved a history indeed: *Babylon has fallen, has fallen!* And the destruction of that city was, [1.] The shame of the Chaldeans, who had taken so much pains, and were at such a vast expense, to fortify it (v. 13): *Is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people* who have laboured so hard to defend that city *shall labour in the very fire*, shall see the out-works which they confided in the strength of set on fire, and shall labour in vain to save them? Or they, in their pursuits of worldly wealth and honour, put themselves to great fatigue, and ran a great hazard, as those that *labour in the fire* do. The worst that can be said of the labourers in God's vineyards is that *they have borne the burden and heat of the day* (Matt. xx. 12); but those that are eager in their worldly pursuits *labour in the very fire*, make themselves perfect slaves to their lusts. There is not a greater drudge in the world than he that is under the power of reigning covetousness. And what comes of it? Though they take a world of pains they are but poorly paid for it; for, after all, *they weary themselves for very vanity*; they were told it was vanity, and when they find themselves disappointed of it, and disappointed in it, they will own it is worse than vanity, it is  *vexation of spirit*. [2.] It was the honour of God, as a God of impartial justice and irresistible power; for by the ruin of the Chaldean monarchy (which all the world could not but take notice of) *the earth was filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*, v. 14. *The Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, especially when he is pleased to *look upon proud men and abase them*, for he thereby proves himself to be *God alone*, Job xl. 11, 12. See what good God brings out of the staining and sinking of earthly glory; he thereby manifests and magnifies his own glory, and *fills the earth* with the knowledge of it as plentifully as the *waters cover the sea*, which lie deep, spread far, and shall not be

dried up until time shall be no more. Such is the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* given by the gospel (2 Cor. iv. 6), and such was the knowledge of his glory by the miraculous ruin of Babylon. Note, Such as will not be taught the knowledge of God's glory by the judgments of his mouth shall be made to know and acknowledge it by the judgments of his hand.

15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to *him*, and maketh *him* drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! 16 Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing *shall be* on thy glory. 17 For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, *which* made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. 18 What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? 19 Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and *there is* no breath at all in the midst of it. 20 But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

The three foregoing articles, upon which the woes here are grounded, are very near akin to each other. The criminals charged by them are oppressors and extortioners, that raise estates by rapine and injustice; and it is mentioned here again (v. 17), the very same that was said v. 8, for that is the crime upon which the greatest stress is laid; it is *because of men's blood*, innocent blood, barbarously and unjustly shed, which is a provoking crying thing; it is *for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein*, which God will certainly reckon for, sooner or later, as the asserter of right and the avenger of wrong.

But here are two articles more, of a different nature, which carry a *woe* to all those in general to whom they belong, and particularly to the Babylonian monarchs, by whom the people of God were taken and held captives.

I. The promoters of drunkenness stand here impeached and condemned. Belshazzar was one of those; he was so, remarkably



that very night that the prophecy of this chapter was fulfilled in the period of his life and kingdom, when he *drank wine before a thousand* of his lords (Dan. v. 1), began the healths, and forced them to pledge him. And perhaps it was one reason why the succeeding monarchs of Persia made it a law of their kingdom that *in drinking none should compel, but they should do according to every man's pleasure* (as we find, Esth. i. 8), because they had seen in the kings of Babylon the mischievous consequences of forcing healths and making people drunk. But the woe here stands firm and very fearful against all those, whoever they are, who are guilty of this sin at any time, and in any place, from the stately palace (where that was) to the paltry ale-house. Observe,

1. Who the sinner is that is here articulated against; it is he that *makes his neighbour drunk*, v. 15. To give a neighbour drink who is in want, who is thirsty and poor, though it be but a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, to give drink to weary traveller, nay, and to give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that are heavy of heart, is a piece of charity which is required of us, and shall be recompensed to us. *I was thirsty, and you gave me drink*. But to give a neighbour drink who has enough already, and more than enough, with design to intoxicate him, that he may expose himself, may talk foolishly, and make himself ridiculous, may disclose his own secret concerns, or be drawn in to agree to a bad bargain for himself—this is abominable wickedness; and those who are guilty of it, who make a practice of it, and take a pride and pleasure in it, are rebels against God in heaven, and his sacred laws, factors for the devil in hell, and his cursed interests, and enemies to men on earth, and their honour and welfare; they are like the son of Nebat, who *sinned and made Israel to sin*. To entice others to drunkenness, to *put the bottle to them*, that they may be allured to it by its charms, by *looking on the wine when it is red and gives its colour in the cup*, or to force them to it, obliging them by the rules of the club (and club-laws indeed they are) to drink so many glasses, and so filled, is to do what we can, and perhaps more than we know of, towards the murder both of soul and body; and those that do so have a great deal to answer for.

2. What the sentence is that is here passed upon him. There is a woe to him (v. 15), and a punishment (v. 16) that shall answer to the sin. (1.) Does he put the cup of drunkenness into the hand of his neighbour? The cup of fury, the cup of trembling, the *cup of the Lord's right hand*, shall be *turned unto him*; the power of God shall be armed against him. That cup which had gone round among the nations, to make them a *desolation, an astonishment, and a hissing*,

which had made them stumble and *fall*, so that they could *rise no more*, shall at length be put into the hand of the king of Babylon, as was foretold, Jer. xxv. 15, 16, 18, 26, 27. Thus the New-Testament Babylon, which had made the nations drunk with the cup of her fornications, shall *have blood given her to drink, for she is worthy*, Rev. xviii. 3, 6. (2.) Does he take a pleasure in putting his neighbour to shame? He shall himself be loaded with contempt: *"Thou art filled with shame for glory, with shame instead of glory"*, or art filled now with shame more than ever thou wast with glory; and the glory thou hast been filled with shall but serve to make thy shame the more grievous to thyself, and the more ignominious in the eyes of others. *Thou also shalt drink* of the cup of trembling, and shalt expose thyself by thy fear and cowardice, which shall be as the *uncovering of thy nakedness*, to thy shame; and all about thee shall load thee with disgrace, for *shameful spewing shall be on thy glory*, on that which thou hast most prided thyself in, thy dignity, wealth, and dominion; those whom thou hast made drunk shall themselves spew upon it. For *the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts* (v. 17); thou shalt be hunted and run down with as much violence as ever any wild beasts in Lebanon were, shall be spoiled as they are, and thy fall made a sport of; for thou art as one of the beasts that made them afraid, and therefore they triumph when they have got the mastery of thee." Or, "It is because of the violence thou hast done to Lebanon, that is, the land of Israel (Deut. iii. 25) and the temple (Zech. xi. 1), that God now reckons with thee; that is the sin that now covers thee."

II. The promoters of idolatry stand here impeached and condemned; and this also was a sin that Babylon was notoriously guilty of; it was the *mother of harlots*. Belshazzar, in his revels, *praised his idols*. And, for this, here is a woe against them, and in them against all others that do likewise, particularly the New-Testament Babylon. Now see here,

1. What they do to promote idolatry; they are *mad upon their idols*; so the Chaldeans are said to be, Jer. l. 38. For, (1.) They have a great variety of idols, their *graven images and molten images*, that people may take their choice, which they like best. (2.) They are very nice and curious in the framing of them: The *maker of the work* has performed his part admirably well, the *fashioner of his fashion* (so it is in the margin), that contrived the model in the most significant manner. (3.) They are at great expense in beautifying and adorning them: *They lay them over with gold and silver*; because these are things people love and dote upon wherever they meet with them, they dress up their idols in them, the more effectually to court the adoration of the children of

this world. (4.) They have great expectations from them: *Themaker of the work trusts therein* as his god, puts a confidence in it, and gives honour to it as his god. The worshippers of God give honour to him, by offering up their prayers to him, and waiting to receive instructions and directions from him; and these honours they give to their idols. [1.] They pray to them: *They say to the wood, Awake for our relief, "awake to hear our prayers;"* and to the dumb stone, "*Arise, and save us,*" as the church prays to her God, *Awake, O Lord! arise,* Ps. xlv. 23. They own their image to be a god by praying to it. *Deliver me, for thou art my God,* Isa. xlv. 17. *Deos qui rogat ille facit—That to which a man addresses petitions is to him a god.* [2.] They consult them as oracles, and expect to be directed and dictated to by them: *They say to the dumb stone, though it cannot speak, yet it shall teach.* What the wicked demon, or no less wicked priest, speaks to them from the image, they receive with the utmost veneration, as of divine authority, and are ready to be governed by it. Thus is idolatry planted and propagated under the specious show of religion and devotion.

2. How the extreme folly of this is exposed. God, by Isaiah, when he foretold the deliverance of his people out of Babylon, largely showed the shameful stupidity and sottishness of idolaters, and so he does here by the prophet, on the like occasion. (1.) Their images, when they have made them, are but mere matter, which is the meanest lowest rank of being; and all the expense they are at upon them cannot advance them one step above that. They are wholly void both of sense and reason, lifeless and speechless (the idol is a *dumb idol, a dumb stone*, and there is *no breath at all in the midst of it*), so that the most minute animal, that has but breath and motion, is more excellent than they. They have not so much as the spirit of a beast. (2.) It is not in their power to do their worshippers any good (v. 18): *What profits the graven image?* Though it be mere matter, if it were cast into some other form it might be serviceable to some purpose or other of human life; but, as it is made a god of, it is of no profit at all, nor can do its worshippers the least kindness. Nay, (3.) It is so far from profiting them that it puts a cheat upon them, and keeps them under the power of a strong delusion; they say, *It shall teach*, but it is a *teacher of lies*; for it represents God as having a body, as being finite, visible, and dependent, whereas he is a Spirit, infinite, invisible, and independent, and it confirms those that become vain in their imaginations in the false notions they have of God, and makes the idea of God to be a precarious thing, and what every man pleases. If we may say to the *works of our hands*, *You are our gods*, we may say so to any of the creatures of our own fancy, though the chimera be ever so extravagant. An image is a

*doctrine of vanities*; it is *falsehood*, and a *work of errors*, Jer. x. 8, 14, 15. It is therefore easy to see what the religion of those is, and what they aim at, who recommend those teachers of lies as laymen's books, which they are to study and govern themselves by, when they have locked up from them the book of the scriptures in an unknown tongue.

3. How the people of God triumph in him, and therewith support themselves, when the idolaters thus shame themselves (v. 20): *But the Lord is in his holy temple.* (1.) *Our rock is not as their rock*, Deut. xxxii. 31. Theirs are dumb idols; ours is Jehovah, a living God, who is what he is, and not, as theirs, what men please to make him. He is in his holy temple in heaven, the residence of his glory, where we have access to him in the way, not which we have invented, but which he himself has instituted. Compare Ps. cxv. 3, *But our God is in the heavens*, and Ps. xi. 4. (2.) The multitude of their gods which they set up, and take so much pains to support, cannot thrust out our God; he is, and will be, in his holy temple still, and glorious in holiness. They have laid waste his temple at Jerusalem; but he has a temple above that is out of the reach of their rage and malice, but within the reach of his people's faith and prayers. (3.) Our God will make all the world silent before him, will strike the idolaters as dumb as their idols, convincing them of their folly, and covering them with shame. He will silence the fury of the oppressors, and check their rage against his people. (4.) It is the duty of his people to attend him with silent adorings (Ps. lxxv. 1), and patiently to wait for his appearing to save them in his own way and time. *Be still, and know that he is God*, Zech. ii. 13.

## CHAP. III.

Still the correspondence is kept up between God and his prophet.

In the first chapter he spoke to God, then God to him, and then he to God again; in the second chapter God spoke wholly to him by the Spirit of prophecy; now, in this chapter, he speaks wholly to God by the Spirit of prayer, for he would not let the intercourse drop on his side, like a genuine son of Abraham, who "returned not to his place until God had left communing with him." Gen. xlviii. 33. The prophet's prayer, in this chapter, is in imitation of David's psalms, for it is directed "to the chief musician," and is set to musical instruments. The prayer is left upon record for the use of the church, and particularly of the Jews in their captivity, while they were waiting for their deliverance, promised by the vision in the foregoing chapter. I. He earnestly begs of God to relieve and succour his people in affliction, to hasten their deliverance, and to comfort them in the mean time, ver. 2. II. He calls to mind the experiences which the church formerly had of God's glorious and gracious appearances on her behalf, when he brought Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan, and there many a time wrought wonderful deliverances for them, ver. 3-15. III. He affects himself with a holy concern for the present troubles of the church, but encourages himself and others to hope that the issue will be comfortable and glorious at last, though all visible means fail, ver. 16-19.

A PRAYER of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. 2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.



This chapter is entitled a *prayer of Habakkuk*. It is a meditation with himself, an intercession for the church. Prophets were praying men; this prophet was so (*He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. xx. 7); and sometimes they prayed for even those whom they prophesied against. Those that were intimately acquainted with the mind of God concerning future events knew better than others how to order their prayers, and what to pray for, and, in the foresight of troublous times, could lay up a stock of prayers that might then receive a gracious answer, and so be serving the church by their prayers when their prophesying was over. This prophet had found God ready to answer his requests and complaints before, and therefore now repeats his applications to him. Because *God has inclined his ear to us*, we must resolve that *therefore we will call upon him as long as we live*. 1. The prophet owns the receipt of God's answer to his former representation, and the impression it made upon him (v. 2): "*O Lord! I have heard thy speech, thy hearing*" (so some read it), "that which thou wouldst have us hear, the decree that has gone forth for the afflicting of thy people. *I received thine*, and it is before me." Note, Those that would rightly order their speech to God must carefully observe, and lay before them, his speech to them. He had said (ch. ii. 1), *I will watch to see what he will say*; and now he owns, *Lord, I have heard thy speech*; for, if we turn a deaf ear to God's word, we can expect no other than that he should turn a deaf ear to our prayers, Prov. xxviii. 9. *I heard it, and was afraid*. Messages immediately from heaven commonly struck even the best and boldest men into a consternation; Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel, did *exceedingly fear and quake*. But, besides that, the matter of this message made the prophet afraid, when he heard how low the people of God should be brought, under the oppressing power of the Chaldeans, and how long they should continue under it; he was afraid lest their spirits should quite fail, and lest the church should be utterly rooted out and run down, and, being kept low so long, should be lost at length. 2. He earnestly prays that *for the elect's sake* these *days of trouble* might be *shortened*, or the trouble of these days mitigated and moderated, or the people of God supported and comforted under it. He thinks it very long to wait till the *end of the years*; perhaps he refers to the seventy years fixed for the continuance of the captivity, and therefore, "*Lord*," says he, "*do something on our behalf in the midst of the years*, those years of our distress; though we be not delivered, and our oppressors destroyed, yet let us not be abandoned and cast off." (1.) "*Do something for thy own cause: Revive thy work, thy church*" (that is the *work of God's own hand*, formed by him, formed for

him); "*revive that, even when it walks in the midst of trouble*, Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8. Grant thy people *a little reviving in their bondage*, Ezra ix. 8; Ps. lxxxv. 6. *Preserve alive thy work*" (so some read it); "*though thy church be chastened, let it not be killed*; though it have not its liberty, yet continue its life, save a remnant alive, to be a seed of another generation. *Revive the work of thy grace* in us, by sanctifying the trouble to us and supporting us under it, though the time be not yet come, *even the set time*, for our deliverance out of it. Whatever becomes of us, though we be as dead and dry bones, Lord, let *thy work be revived*, let not that sink, and go back, and come to nothing." (2.) "*Do something for thy own honour: In the midst of the years make known*, make thyself known, for now *verily thou art a God that hidest thyself* (Isa. xlv. 15), make known thy power, thy pity, thy promise, thy providence, in the government of the world, for the safety and welfare of thy church. Though we be buried in obscurity, yet, Lord, make thyself known; whatever becomes of Israel, let not the God of Israel be forgotten in the world, but discover himself even in the midst of the dark years, before thou art expected to appear." When *in the midst of the years* of the captivity God miraculously owned the three children in the fiery furnace, and humbled Nebuchadnezzar, this prayer was answered, *In the midst of the years make known*. (3.) "*Do something for thy people's comfort: In wrath remember mercy*, and make that known. *Show us thy mercy, O Lord!*" Ps. lxxxv. 7. They see God's displeasure against them in their troubles, and that makes them grievous indeed. There is wrath in the bitter cup; that therefore they deprecate, and are earnest in begging that *in the midst of wrath* God would *remember mercy* to them, would make it appear that he is a merciful God and they are vessels of his mercy. Note, Even those that are under the tokens of God's wrath must not despair of his mercy; and mercy, mere mercy, is that which we must flee to for refuge, and rely upon as our only plea. He does not say, *Remember our merit*, but, Lord, *remember thy own mercy*.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. 4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. 5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. 6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered,

the perpetual hills did bow: his ways *are* everlasting. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: *and* the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. 8 Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? *was* thine anger against the rivers? *was* thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses *and* thy chariots of salvation? 9 Thy bow was made quite naked, *according* to the oaths of the tribes, *even thy word*. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw thee, *and* they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, *and* lifted up his hands on high. 11 The sun *and* moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, *and* at the shining of thy glittering spear. 12 Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. 13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, *even* for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. 14 Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing *was* as to devour the poor secretly. 15 Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, *through* the heap of great waters.

It has been the usual practice of God's people, when they have been in distress and ready to fall into despair, to help themselves by recollecting their experiences, and reviving them, *considering the days of old*, and *the years of ancient times* (Ps. lxxvii. 5), and pleading them with God in prayer, as he is pleased sometimes to plead them with himself. Isa. lxiii. 11, *Then he remembered the days of old*. This is that which the prophet does here, and he looks as far back as the first forming of them into a people, when they were brought by miracles out of Egypt, *a house of bondage*, through the wilderness, *a land of drought*, into Canaan, then possessed by *mighty nations*. He that thus brought them at first into Canaan, through so much difficulty, can now bring them thither again out of Babylon, how great soever the difficulties are that lie in the way. Those works of wonder, wrought of old, are here

most magnificently described, for the greater encouragement to the faith of God's people in their present straits.

I. God appeared in his glory, so as he never did before or since (v. 3, 4): *He came from Teman, even the Holy One from Mount Paran*. This refers to the visible display of the glory of God when he gave the law upon Mount Sinai, as appears by Deut. xxxiii. 2, whence these expressions are borrowed. *Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai in a cloud* (Exod. xix. 20) and his glory was *as the devouring fire*, not only to enforce the law he then gave them, but to avow the deliverance he had wrought for them and to magnify it; for the first word he said there was, "*I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee out of the land of Egypt*." I that appear in this glory am the author of that work." Then *his glory covered the heavens*, which shone with the reflection of that glorious appearance of his; the *earth also was full of his praise*, or of his *splendour*, as some read it. People at a distance saw the cloud and fire on the top of Mount Sinai, and praised the God of Israel. Or the earth was full of those works of God which were to be praised. *His brightness was as the light*, as the light of the sun when he goes forth in his strength; *he had horns, or bright beams* (so it should be rendered), *coming out of his side or hand*. Rays of glory were darted forth around him; and with some rays borrowed thence it was that Moses's face shone when he *came down from that mount of glory*. Some by the horns, the *two horns* (for the word is dual), *coming out of his hand*, understand the *two tables of the law*, which perhaps, when God delivered them to Moses, though they were tables of stone, had a glory round them; those books were gilt with beams, and so it agrees with Deut. xxxiii. 2, *From his right hand went a fiery law for them*. It is added, *And there was the hiding of his power*; there was his hidden power, in the rays that came out of his hand. The operations of his power, compared with what he could have done, were rather the hiding of it than the discovery of it; the secrets of his power, as well as of his wisdom, are *double to that which is*, Job xi. 6.

II. God sent plagues on Egypt, for the humbling of proud Pharaoh, and the obliging of him to let the people go (v. 5): *Before him went the pestilence*, which slew all the first-born of Egypt in one night; and *burning coals went forth at his feet*, when, in the plague of hail, there was *fire mingled with hail—burning diseases* (so the margin reads it), some think those that wasted Egypt, others those with which the number of the Canaanites was diminished before Israel was brought in upon them. These were *at his feet*, that is, at his coming, for they are at his command; he says to them, Go, and they go, Come, and they come, Do this, and they do it.

III. He divided the land of Canaan to



his people Israel, and expelled the heathen from before them (v. 6): *He stood, and measured the earth*, measured that land, to assign it for an inheritance to Israel his people, Deut. xxii. 8, 9. *He beheld, and drove asunder the nations* that were in possession of it; though they combined together against Israel, God dispersed and discomfited them before Israel. Or he exerted such a mighty power as was enough to shake in pieces all the nations of the earth. Then *the everlasting mountains were scattered, and the perpetual hills did bow*; the mighty princes and potentates of Canaan, that seemed as high, as strong, and as firmly fixed, as the mountains and hills, were broken to pieces; they and their kingdoms were totally subdued. Or the power of God was so exerted as to shake the mountains and hills; nay, and Sinai did tremble, and the adjacent hills; see Ps. lxxviii. 7, 8. To this he adds, *His ways are everlasting*, that is, all the motions of his providence are according to his eternal counsels; and he is the same for ever, that which he was yesterday and to-day. His covenant is unchangeable, and *his mercy endures for ever*. When he *drove asunder the nations of Canaan* one might have seen the *tents of Cushan in affliction, the curtains of the land of Midian trembling*, and all the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries taking the alarm; and though they were not in the commission given to Israel to destroy, nor their land within the warrant given to Israel to possess, yet they thought their own house was in danger when their neighbour's house was on fire, and therefore they were in a great fright, v. 7. Balak the king of Moab was so, Num. xxii. 3, 4. Some make the tents of Cushan to be in affliction when, in the days of judge Othniel, God delivered Cushan-rishathaim into his hand (Judg. iii. 8), and the *curtains of the land of Midian to tremble* when, in the days of judge Gideon, a barley cake, in a dream, overthrew the tent of Midian, Judg. vii. 13.

IV. He divided the Red Sea and Jordan, when they stood in the way of Israel's progress, and yet fetched a river out of a rock when Israel wanted it, v. 8. One would have thought that God was *displeased with the rivers*, and that *his wrath was against the sea*, for he made them give way and flee before him when he *rode upon his horses and chariots of salvation*, as a general at the head of his forces, mighty to save. Note, God's chariots are not so much chariots of state to himself as chariots of salvation to his people; it is his glory to be Israel's Saviour. This seems to be referred to again (v. 15): "*Thou didst walk through the sea*, through the Red Sea, *with thy horses*, in the pillar of cloud and fire (that was his chariot drawn by angels); thus thou didst walk secure, and so as to accommodate thyself to the slow pace that Israel could go, as Jacob tenderly drove, in consideration of his children and cattle:

*Thou didst walk through the heap, or mud, of great waters*; and Israel likewise was led *through the deep as a horse through the wilderness*," Isa. lxi. 13, 14. When they came to enter Canaan the *overflowing of the water passed by*, that is, Jordan, which at that time overflowed all his banks, was divided, Josh. iii. 15. Note, When the difficulties in the way of perfecting the salvation of Israel seem most insuperable, when they rise to the height, and overflow, yet then God can put them by, break through them, and get over them. Then *the deep uttered his voice*, when, the Red Sea and Jordan being divided, the waters roared and made a noise, as if they were sensible of the restraint they were under from proceeding in their natural course, and complained of it. They *lifted up their hands, or sides, on high* (for the waters stood up on a heap, Josh. iii. 16), as if they would have made opposition to the orders given them. They *lifted up their voice, lifted up their waves*; but in vain. *The Lord on high was mightier than they*, Ps. xciii. 3, 4. With the dividing of the sea and Jordan, notice is again taken of the trembling of the mountains, as if the stop given to the waters gave a shock to the adjacent hills; they are put together, Ps. cxiv. 3, 4. When *the sea saw it and fled, and Jordan was driven back, the mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs*. The whole creation yielded; earth and waters trembled at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the mighty God of Jacob. But (as Mr. Cowley paraphrases it) Fly where thou wilt, thou sea; and, Jordan's current, cease.

Jordan, there is no need of thee;

For at God's word, whene'er he please,

The rocks shall weep new waters forth instead of these.

So here, *Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers*; channels were made in the wilderness, such as seemed to cleave the earth, for the waters to run in, which issued out of the rock, to supply the camp of Israel, and which followed them in all their removes. Note, The God of nature can alter and control the powers of nature, which way he pleases, can turn waters into crystal rocks and rocks into crystal streams.

V. He arrested the motion of the sun and moon, to befriend and complete Israel's victories (v. 11): *The sun and moon stood still* at the prayer of Joshua, that the Canaanites might not have the benefit of the night to favour their escape; they *stood still in their habitation* in the heaven (Ps. xix. 4), but with an eye to Gibeon and the valley of Ajalon, where God's work was in the doing, and of which they, though at so vast a distance, attended the motions. *At the light*, at the direction, *of thy arrows, they went*, and at the *shining of thy glittering spear*; they followed Israel's arms, to favour them; according to the intimation of the arrows God shot (as Jonathan's arrows, 1 Sam. xx. 20), and which

way soever his spear pointed (the glittering light of which they acknowledged to out-shine theirs) that way they directed their influences, benign to Israel and malignant against their enemies, as when *the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*. Note, The heavenly bodies, as well as earth and seas, are at God's command, and, when he pleases, at Israel's service too.

VI. He carried on and completed Israel's victories over the nations of Canaan and their kings; he *slew great kings and famous*, Ps. cxxxvi. 17, 18. This is largely insisted upon here, as a proper plea with God to enforce the present petition, that he would restore them again to that land which they were, at the expense of so many lives, so many miracles, first put in possession of.

1. Many expressions are here used to set forth the conquest of Canaan. (1.) God's bow was made quite naked, taken out of the case, to be employed for Israel; we should say, his sword was quite unsheathed, not drawn out a little way, to frighten the enemy, and then put up again, but quite drawn out, not to be returned till they are all cut off. (2.) He marched through the land from end to end, in indignation, as scorning to let that wicked generation of Canaanites any longer possess so good a land. He marched *cum fastidio—with disdain* (so some), despising their confederacies. (3.) He threshed the heathen in anger, trod them down, nay, he trod them out, as corn in the floor, to give them, and what they had, to be meat to his people Israel, Mic. iv. 13. (4.) He wounded the heads out of the house of the wicked; he destroyed the families of the Canaanites, and wounded their princes, the heads of their families; nay, he cut off the heads, and so discovered the foundations of them, even to the neck. Are they a building? They are razed even to the foundation. Are they a body? They are plunged into deep mire even to the neck, so that they cannot get out, or help themselves. He broke the heads of *leviathan in pieces*, Ps. lxxiv. 14. Some apply this to Christ's victories over Satan and the powers of darkness, in which he wounded the heads over many countries, Ps. cx. 6. (5.) He struck through with his staves the head of the villages (v. 14); with Israel's staves God struck through the head of the villages of the enemies, whether Egypt or Canaan. Staves shall do the same execution as swords when God pleases to make use of them. The enemy came out with the utmost force and fury, as a *whirlwind to scatter me* (says Israel); for many a time have they thus afflicted me, thus attacked me, from my youth, Ps. cxxix. 1. Pharaoh, when he pursued Israel to the Red Sea, came out as a whirlwind; so did the kings of Canaan in their confederacies against Israel. Their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly; they were as confident of success in their enterprise as ever any great man was of devouring a poor man, that was no way a match for

him; and his design against him was carried on with secrecy. But God disappointed them, and their pride did but make their fall the more shameful and God's care of his poor the more illustrious. (6.) He walked to the sea with his horses (so some read it, v. 15), that is, he carried Israel's victories to the Great Sea, which was opposite to that side of Canaan at which they entered, so that they went quite through it, and made themselves masters of it all, or rather God made them so, for they got it not by their own sword, Ps. xlv. 3. Now,

2. There were three things that God had an eye to, in giving Israel so many bloody victories over the Canaanites:—(1.) He would hereby make good his promise to the fathers; it was according to the oaths of the tribes, even his word, v. 9. He had sworn to give this land to the tribes of Israel; it was his oath to *Isaac confirmed to Jacob*, and repeated many a time to the tribes of Israel, *Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan*. This word God will accomplish, though Israel be ever so unworthy (Deut. ix. 5) and their enemies ever so many and mighty. Note, What God does for his tribes is according to the oaths of the tribes, according to what he has said and sworn to them; for he is faithful that has promised. (2.) He would hereby show his kindness to his people, because of their relation to him, and his interest in them: *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people*, v. 13. All the powers of nature are shaken, and the course of nature changed, and every thing seems to be thrown into disorder, and all is for the salvation of God's people. There are a people in the world who are God's people, and their salvation is that which he has in his eye in all the operations of his providence. Heaven and earth shall sooner come together than any of the links in the golden chain of their salvation shall be broken; and even that which seems most unlikely shall by an overruling hand be made to work for their salvation, Phil. i. 19. (3.) He would hereby give a type and figure of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. It is for salvation with thy anointed, with Joshua, who led the armies of Israel and was a figure of him whose name he bore, even Jesus our Joshua. What God did for his Israel of old was done with an eye to his anointed, for the sake of the Mediator, who was both the founder and foundation of the covenant made with them. It was salvation with him, for in all the salvations wrought for them, God looked upon the face of the anointed, and did them by him.

16 When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. 17 Al-



though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls: 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Within the compass of these few lines we have the prophet in the highest degree both of trembling and triumphing, such are the varieties both of the state and of the spirit of God's people in this world. In heaven there shall be no more trembling, but everlasting triumphs.

I. The prophet had foreseen the prevalence of the church's enemies and the long continuance of the church's troubles; and the sight made him tremble, *v. 16*. Here he goes on with what he had said *v. 2*, "*I have heard thy speech and was afraid. When I heard what sad times were coming upon the church my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; the news made such an impression that it put me into a perfect ague fit.*" The blood retiring to the heart, to succour that when it was ready to faint, the extreme parts were left destitute of spirits, so that *his lips quivered*. Nay, he was so weak, and so unable to help himself, that he was as if *rotteness had entered into his bones*; he had no strength left in him, could neither stand nor go; he *trembled in himself*, trembled all over him, trembled within him; he yielded to his trembling, and *troubled himself*, as our Saviour did; his *flesh trembled for fear of God and he was afraid of his judgments*, Ps. cxix. 120. He was touched with a tender concern for the calamities of the church, and trembled for fear lest they should end at length in its ruin, and the *name of Israel be blotted out*. Nor did he think it any disparagement to him, nor any reproach to his courage, but freely owned he was one of those that *trembled at God's word*, for to them he will look with favour: *I tremble in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble*. Note, When we see a day of trouble approaching it concerns us to provide accordingly, and to lay up something in store, by the help of which we may rest in that day; and the best way to make sure rest for ourselves in the day of trouble is to tremble within ourselves at the word of God and the threatenings of that word. He that has joy in store for those that *sow in tears* has rest in store for those that tremble before him. *Good hope through grace* is founded in a *holy fear*. Noah, who was *moved with*

*fear*, and trembled within himself at the warning given him of the deluge coming, had the ark for his resting place in the day of that trouble. The prophet tells us what he said in his trembling. His fear is that, *when he comes up to the people*, when the Chaldean comes up to the people of Israel, *he will invade them*, will surround them, will break in upon them, nay (as it is in the margin), *he will cut them in pieces with his troops*; he cried out, We are all undone; the whole nation of the Jews is lost and gone. Note, When things look bad we are too apt to aggravate them, and make the worst of them.

II. He had looked back upon the experiences of the church in former ages, and had observed what great things God had done for them, and so he recovered himself out of his fright, and not only retrieved his temper, but fell into a transport of holy joy, with an express *non obstante—notwithstanding* to the calamities he foresaw coming, and this not for himself only, but in the name of every faithful Israelite.

1. He supposes the ruin of all his creature comforts and enjoyments, not only of the delights of this life, but even of the necessary supports of it, *v. 17*. Famine is one of the ordinary effects of war, and those commonly feel it first and most that sit still and are quiet; the prophet and his pious friends, when the Chaldean army comes, will be plundered and stripped of all they have. Or he supposes himself deprived of all by blasting and unseasonable weather, or some other immediate hand of God. Or though the captives in Babylon have not that plenty of all good things in their own land. (1.) He supposes the fruit-tree to be withered and become barren; the *fig-tree* (which used to furnish them with much of their food; hence we often read of *cakes of figs*) shall not so much as blossom, nor shall fruit be in the vine, from which they had their drink, that made glad the heart: he supposes the *labour of the olive to fail*, their oil, which was to them as butter is to us; the *labour of the olive shall lie* (so it is in the margin); their expectations from it shall be disappointed. (2.) He supposes the bread-corn to fail; *the fields shall yield no meat*; and, since the king himself is served of the field, if the productions of that be withdrawn, every one will feel the want of them. (3.) He supposes the cattle to perish for want of the food which the field should yield and does not, or by disease, or being destroyed and carried away by the enemy: *The flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stall*. Note, When we are in the full enjoyment of our creature comforts we should consider that there may come a time when we shall be stripped of them all, and use them accordingly, as not abusing them, 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30.

2. He resolves to delight and triumph in

God notwithstanding ; when all is gone his God is not gone (v. 18) : “ *Yet will I rejoice in the Lord ; I shall have him to rejoice in, and will rejoice in him.*” *Destroy the vines and the fig-trees*, and you make all the mirth of a carnal heart to cease, Hos. ii. 11, 12. But those who, when they were full, enjoyed God in all, when they are emptied and impoverished can *enjoy all in God*, and can sit down upon a melancholy heap of the ruins of all their creature comforts and even then can sing to the praise and glory of God, as the God of their salvation. This is the principal ground of our joy in God, that he is the God of our salvation, our eternal salvation, the salvation of the soul ; and, if he be so, we may rejoice in him as such in our greatest distresses, since by them our salvation cannot be hindered, but may be furthered. Note, Joy in God is never out of season, nay, it is in a special manner seasonable when we meet with losses and crosses in the world, that it may then appear that our hearts are not set upon these things, nor our happiness bound up in them. See how the prophet triumphs in God : *The Lord God is my strength*, v. 19. He that is the God of our salvation in another world will be our strength in this world, to carry us on in our journey thither, and help us over the difficulties and oppositions we meet with in our way. Even when provisions are cut off, to make it appear that *man lives not by bread alone*, we may have the want of bread sup-

plied by the graces and comforts of God's Spirit and with the supplies of them. (1.) We shall be strong for our spiritual warfare and work : *The Lord God is my strength*, the strength of my heart. (2.) We shall be swift for our spiritual race : “ *He will make my feet like hinds' feet*, that with enlargement of heart I may run the way of his commands and outrun my troubles.” (3.) We shall be successful in our spiritual enterprises : “ *He will make me to walk upon my high places ; that is, I shall gain my point, shall be restored unto my own land, and tread upon the high places of the enemy*,” Deut. xxxii. 13 ; xxxiii. 29. Thus the prophet, who began his prayer with fear and trembling, concludes it with joy and triumph, for prayer is heart's ease to a gracious soul. When Hannah had prayed she *went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad*. This prophet, finding it so, publishes his experience of it, and puts it into the hand of the *chief singer* for the use of the church, especially in the day of our captivity. And, though then the harps were hung upon the willow-trees, yet in the hope that they would be resumed, and their right hand retrieve its cunning, which it had forgotten, he set his song upon *Shigionoth* (v. 1), wandering tunes, *according to the variable songs*, and upon *Neginoth* (v. 19), *the stringed instruments*. He that is afflicted, and has prayed aright, may then be so easy, may then be so merry, as to sing psalms.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

## ZEPHANIAH.

THIS prophet is placed last, as he was last in time, of all the minor prophets before the captivity, and not long before Jeremiah, who lived at the time of the captivity. He foretells the general destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and sets their sins in order before them, which had provoked God to bring their ruin upon them, calls them to repentance, threatens the neighbouring nations with the like destructions, and gives encouraging promises of their joyful return out of captivity in due time, which have a reference to the grace of the gospel. We have, in the first verse, an account of the prophet and the date of his prophecy, which supersedes our enquiry concerning them here.

## CHAP. I.

After the title of the book (ver. 1) here is, I. A threatening of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, an utter destruction, by the Chaldeans, ver. 2—4. II. A charge against them for their gross sin, which provoked God to bring that destruction upon them (ver. 5, 6) ; and so he goes on in the rest of the chapter, setting both the judgments before them, that they might prevent them or prepare for them, and the sins that destroy them, that they might judge themselves, and justify God in what was brought upon them. 1. They must hold their peace because they had greatly sinned,

ver. 7—9. But, 2. They shall howl because the trouble will be great. The day of the Lord is near, and it will be a terrible day, ver. 10—18. Such fair and timely warning as this did God give to the Jews of the approaching captivity ; but they hardened their neck, which made their destruction remediless.

THE word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son



of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. 2 I will utterly consume all *things* from off the land, saith the LORD. 3 I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. 4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, *and* the name of the Chemarims with the priests; 5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship *and* that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; 6 And them that are turned back from the LORD; and *those* that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.

Here is, I. The title-page of this book (v. 1), in which we observe, 1. What authority it has, and who gave it that authority; it is from heaven, and not of men: It is *the word of the Lord*. 2. Who was the instrument of conveying it to the church. His name was *Zephaniah*, which signifies the *servant of the Lord*, for God revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets. The pedigree of other prophets, whose extraction we have an account of, goes no further back than their father, except Zecharias, whose grandfather also is named. But this of Zephaniah goes back four generations, and the highest mentioned is *Hizkiah*; it is the very same name in the original with that of Hezekiah king of Judah (2 Kings xviii. 1), and refers probably to him; if so, our prophet, being lineally descended from that pious prince, and being of the royal family, could with the better grace reprove the folly of the king's children as he does, v. 8. 3. When this prophet prophesied—in the days of *Josiah king of Judah*, who reigned well, and in the twelfth year of his reign began vigorously, and carried on a work of reformation, in which he destroyed idols and idolatry. Now it does not appear whether Zephaniah prophesied in the beginning of his reign; if so, we may suppose his prophesying had a great and good influence on that reformation. When he, as God's messenger, reprov'd the idolatries of Jerusalem, Josiah, as God's vicergerent, removed them; and reformation is likely to go on and prosper when both magistrates and ministers do their part towards it. If it were towards the latter end of his reign that he prophesied, we sadly see how

a corrupt people relapse into their former distempers. The idolatries Josiah had abolished, it should seem, returned in his own time, when the heat of the reformation began a little to abate and wear off. What good can the best reformers do with a people that hate to be reformed, as if they longed to be ruined?

II. The summary, or contents, of this book. The general proposition contained in it is, That utter destruction is coming apace upon Judah and Jerusalem for sin. Without preamble, or apology, he begins abruptly (v. 2): *By taking away I will make an end of all things from off the face of the land, saith the Lord*. Ruin is coming, utter ruin, destruction from the Almighty. He has said it who can, and will, make good what he has said: "*I will utterly consume all things*. I will gather all things" (so some); "I will recal all the blessings I have bestowed, because they have abused them and so forfeited them." The consumption determined shall take away, 1. The inferior creatures: *I will consume the beasts, the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea* (v. 3), as, in the deluge, every living substance was destroyed that was upon the face of the ground, Gen. vii. 23. The creatures were made for man's use, and therefore when he has perverted the use of them, and made them *subject to vanity*, God, to show the greatness of his displeasure against the sin of man, involves them in his punishment. The expressions are figurative, denoting universal desolation. Those that fly ever so high, as the fowls of heaven, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' hand—those that hide ever so close, as the fishes of the sea, and think themselves out of the reach of the enemies' eye—shall yet become a prey to them, and be utterly consumed. 2. The children of men: "*I will consume man; I will cut off man from the land*. The land shall be dispeopled and left uninhabited; I will destroy, not only Israel, but *man*. The land shall enjoy *no* sabbaths. I will cut off, not only the wicked men, but all men; even the few among them that are good shall be involved in this common calamity. Though they shall not be cut off from the Lord, yet they shall be cut off from the land." It is with Judah and Jerusalem that God has this quarrel, both city and country, and upon them he will stretch out his hand, the hand of his power, the hand of his wrath; and *who knows the power of his anger?* v. 4. Those that will not humble themselves under God's mighty hand shall be humbled and brought down by it. Note, Even Judah, where God is known, and Jerusalem, where his dwelling-place is, if they revolt from him and rebel against him, shall have his hand stretched out against them. 3. All wicked people, and all those things that are the matter of their wickedness (v. 3): "*I will consume the stumbling-blocks with the wicked,*

the idols with the idolaters, the offences with the offenders." Josiah had taken away the stumbling-blocks, and, as far as he could, had purged the land of the monuments of idolatry, hoping that there would be no more idolatry; but *the wicked will do wickedly*, the dog will return to his vomit, and therefore, since the sin will not otherwise be cured, the sinners must themselves be consumed, even *the wicked with the stumbling-blocks* of their iniquity, Ezek. xiv. 3. Since it was not done by the sword of justice, it shall be done by the sword of war. See who the sinners are that shall be consumed. (1.) The professed idolaters, who avowed idolatry, and were wedded to it. *The remnant of Baal* shall be cut off, the images of Baal, and the worshippers of those images. Josiah cut off a great deal of Baal; but that which was so close as to escape the eye, or so bold as to escape the hand, of his justice, God will cut off, even all the remains of it. The Chaldeans would spare none of the images of Baal, or the worshippers of those images. *The Chemarim* shall be cut off; we read of them in the history of Josiah's reformation. 2 Kings xxiii. 5, *He put down the idolatrous priests*: the word is the *Chemarim*. The word signifies *black men*, some think because they wore black clothes, affecting to appear grave, others because their faces were black with attending the altars, or the fires in which they burnt their children to Moloch. They seem to have been immediate attendants upon the service of Baal. They shall be cut off *with the priests*, the regulars with the seculars. The very name of them shall be cut off; the order shall be quite abolished, so as to be forgotten, or remembered with detestation. And, among other idolaters, the *worshippers of the host of heaven upon the house-tops* shall be cut off (v. 5), who justified themselves in their idolatry with those that did not worship images, the work of their own hands, but offered their sacrifices and burnt their incense to the sun, moon, and stars, immediately upon the tops of their houses. But God will let them know that he is a jealous God, and will not endure any rival; and, though some have thought that the most specious and plausible idolatry, yet it will appear as great an offence to God to give divine honours to a star as to give them to a stone or a stock. Even the worshippers of the host of heaven shall be consumed as well as the worshippers of the beasts of the earth or the fiends of hell. The sin of the adulteress is not the less sinful for the gaiety of the adulterer. (2.) Those also shall be consumed that think to compound the matter between God and idols, and keep an even hand between them, that halt between God and Baal, and worship between Jehovah and Moloch, and *swear by both*; or, as it might better be read, *swear to the Lord and to Malcham*. They bind themselves by oath and covenant to the service both of

God and idols. They have a good opinion of the worship of the God of Israel; it is the religion of their country, and has been long so, and therefore they will by no means quit it; but they think it will be very much improved and beautified if they join with it the worship of Moloch, for that also is much used in other countries, and travellers admire it; there is a great deal of good fancy and strong flame in it. They cannot keep always to the worship of a God whom they have no visible representation of, and therefore they must have an image; and what better than the image of *Moloch—a king*? They think they shall effectually atone for their sin if they *swear to Moloch*, and, pursuant to that oath, burn their children in sacrifice to that idol; and yet, if they do amiss in that, they hope to atone for it in worshipping the God of Israel too. Note, Those that think to divide their affections and adorations between God and idols will not only come short of acceptance with God, but will have their doom with the worst of idolaters; for what communion can there be between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, God and mammon? She whose own child is not pleads for the dividing of it, for, if Satan have half, he will have all; but the true mother says, *Divide it not*, for, if God have but half, he will have none. Such waters will not be long sweet, if they come from a fountain that sends forth bitter water too; what have those to do to swear by the Lord that swear by Malcham? (3.) Those also shall be consumed that have apostatized from God, together with those that never gave up their names to him, v. 6. I will cut off, [1.] Those *that are turned back from the Lord*, that were well taught, and began well, that had given up their names to him, and set out at first in the worship of him, but have flown off; and turned aside, and fallen in with idolaters, and deserted those good ways of God which they were brought up in, and despised them. Those God will be sure to reckon with who are renegadoes from his service, who began in the Spirit and ended in the flesh; they shall be treated as deserters, to whom no mercy is shown. [2.] Those that *have not sought the Lord*, nor ever enquired for him, never made any profession of religion, and think to excuse themselves with that, shall find that this will not excuse them; nay, this is the thing laid to their charge; they are atheistical careless people, that *live without God in the world*; and those that do so are certainly unworthy to live upon God in the world.

7 Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. 8 And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice,



that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. 9 In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. 10 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, *that there shall be* the noise of a cry from the fish-gate, and a howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. 11 Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant-people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. 12 And it shall come to pass at that time, *that I will search Jerusalem with candles*, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. 13 Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof.

Notice is here given to Judah and Jerusalem that God is coming forth against them, and will be with them shortly; his *presence*, as a just avenger, *his day*, the day of his judgment and his wrath, are not far off, *v. 7*. Those that improve not the presence of God with them as a Father, but sin away that presence, may expect his presence with them as a Judge, to call them to an account for the contempt put upon his grace. The *day of the Lord* will come. Men have their day now, when they take a liberty to do what they please; but *God's day is at hand*; it is here called his *sacrifice*, a sacrifice of his preparing, for the punishing of presumptuous sinners is a sacrifice to the justice of God, some reparation to his injured honour. Those that brought their offerings to other gods were themselves justly made victims to the true God. On a day of sacrifice great slaughter was made; so shall there be in Jerusalem; men shall be killed up as fast as lambs for the altar, with as little regret, with as much pleasure: *The slain of the Lord shall be many*. On a day of sacrifice great feasts were made upon the sacrifices; so the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem shall be feasted upon by their enemies the Chaldeans; these are the guests God has prepared and invited to come and glut themselves—their revenge with slaughter and their covetousness with plunder. Now observe,

I. Who those are that are marked to be sacrificed, that shall be visited and punished

in this day of reckoning, and what it is they shall be called to an account for. 1. The royal family, because of the dignity of their place, shall be first reckoned with for their pride, and vanity, and affectation (*v. 8*): *I will punish the princes, and the king's children*, who think themselves exempt from punishment; they shall find themselves accountable to God, and that, high as they are, he is above them. They shall be punished, and all such as, like them, are clothed with *strange apparel*, such as, in contempt of their own country (where, probably, it was the custom to go in a very plain dress, as became the seed of Jacob that *plain man*), affected to appear in the fashion of other nations and introduced their modes in apparel, studying to resemble those from whom God had appointed them, even in their clothes, industriously to distinguish themselves. The *princes and the king's children* scorned to wear any home-made stuffs, though God had provided them *fine linen and silks* (Ezek. xvi. 10), but they must send abroad to strange countries for their clothes, which would not please unless they were far-fetched and dear-bought; and even those of inferior rank affected to imitate the princes and the king's children. Pride in apparel is displeasing to God, and a symptom of the degeneracy of a people. 2. The noblemen, and their stewards and servants, come next to be reckoned with (*v. 9*): *In the same day will I punish those that leap on the threshold*, a phrase, no doubt, well understood then, and which probably signified the invading of their neighbour's rights. Entering their houses by force and violence, and seizing their possessions, they *leap on the threshold*, as much as to say that the house is their own and they will keep their hold of it; and, accordingly, they make all in it their own that they can lay their hands on, and so *fill their masters' houses* with goods gotten by *violence and deceit* and with all the guilt thereby contracted. Nor shall it suffice them to say that the ill-gotten gains were not for themselves but for their masters, and that what they did was by their order; for the obligations we lie under to keep God's commandments are prior and superior to the obligations we lie under to serve the interests of any master on earth. 3. The trading people, and the rich merchants, are next called to account. Iniquity is found in their end of the town, among the *inhabitants of Maktesh*, a low part of Jerusalem, deep like a mortar (for so the word signifies); the *goldsmiths* lived there (Neh. iii. 32) and the merchants; and they are now *cut down* (they are broken, and have shut up their shops, and become bankrupts); nay, *All those that bear silver are cut off*, in the first place, by the invaders, for the sake of the silver they carry, which is so far from being a protection to them that it will expose and betray them. The conquerors aimed at the wealthy men, and carried them off first.



while the poor of the land escaped. Or it may be meant of a general decay of trade, which was a preface and introduction to the general destruction of the land. It is the token of a declining state when great dealers are cut down, and great bankers are cut off and become bankrupts, who cannot fall alone, but with themselves ruin many. 4. All the secure and careless people, the sons of pleasure, that live a loose idle life, are next reckoned with (v. 12); they come from all parts of the country, to take up their quarters in the head-quarters of the kingdom, where they take private lodgings, and indulge themselves in ease and luxury; but God will find them out, and punish them: *At that time I will search Jerusalem with candles*, to discover them, that they may be brought out to condign punishment. This intimates that they conceal themselves, as being either ashamed of the sin or afraid of the punishment of it; when the judgments of God are abroad they hope to escape by absconding and getting out of the way, but God will search Jerusalem, as search is made for a malefactor in disguise, that is harboured by his accomplices. God's hand will find out all his enemies, wherever they lie hid, and will punish not only the secret idolaters, but the secret epicures and profane; and those are the persons that are here described, and marks are given by which they will be discovered when strict search is made for them. (1.) Their dispositions are sensual: *They are settled on their lees*, intoxicated with their pleasures, strengthening themselves in their wealth and wickedness; they are secure and easy, and, because they have had no changes, they fear none, as Moab, Jer. xlviii. 11. *They have not been emptied from vessel to vessel. They fill themselves with wine and strong drink, and banish all thought, saying, To-morrow shall be as this day*, Isa. lvi. 12. Their being settled on their lees signifies the same with being enclosed in their own fat, Ps. xvii. 10. (2.) Their notions are atheistical. They could not live such loose lives but that they say in their heart, *The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil*; that is, *He will do nothing*. They deny his providential government of the world: "What good and evil there is in the world comes by the wheel of fortune, and not by the disposal of a wise and supreme director." They deny his moral government, and his dispensing rewards and punishments: "*The Lord will not do good to those that serve him, nor do evil to those that rebel against him; and therefore there is nothing got by religion, nor lost by sin.*" This was the effect of their sensuality; if they were not drowned in sense, they could not be thus senseless, nor could they be so stupid if they had not stupified themselves with the love of pleasure. It was also the cause of their sensuality; men would not make a god of their belly if they had not at first become so vain, so vile, in their imagi-

nations, as to think the God that made them altogether such a one as themselves. But God will punish them; their end is destruction, Phil. iii. 19.

II. What the destruction will be with which God will punish these sinners, and what course he will take with them. 1. He will silence them (v. 7): *Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord*. He will force them to hold their peace, will strike them dumb with horror and amazement. They shall be speechless. All the excuses of their sin, and exceptions against the sentence, will be overruled, and they shall not have a word to say for themselves. 2. He will sacrifice them, for it is the day of the Lord's sacrifice (v. 8); he will give them into the hands of their enemies, and glorify himself thereby. 3. He will fill both city and country with lamentation (v. 10): *In that day there shall be a noise of a cry from the fish-gate*, so called because near either to the fish-ponds or to the fish-market. It belonged to the city of David (2 Chron. xxxiii. 14; Neh. iii. 3); perhaps the same with that which is called the first gate (Zech. xiv. 10), and, if so, it will explain what follows here, *And a howling from the second*, that is, the second gate, which was next to that fish-gate. The alarm shall go round the walls of Jerusalem from gate to gate; and there shall be a great crashing from the hills, a mighty noise from the mountains round about Jerusalem, from the acclamations of the victorious invaders, or from the lamentations of the timorous invaded, or from both. The inhabitants of the city, even of the closest safest part of the city, shall howl (v. 11), so clamorous shall the grief be. 4. They shall be stripped of all they have; it shall be a prey to the enemy (v. 13): *Their household goods, and shop-goods, shall become a booty*, and a rich booty they shall be; *their houses shall be levelled with the ground and be a desolation*; those of them that have built new houses shall not inherit them, but the invaders shall get and keep possession of them. And the vineyards they have planted they shall not drink the wine of, but, instead of having it for the relief of their friends that faint among them, they shall part with it for the animating of their foes that fight against them, Deut. xxviii. 30.

14 The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high



towers. 17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Nothing could be expressed with more spirit and life, nor in words more proper to startle and awaken a secure and careless people, than the warning here given to Judah and Jerusalem of the approaching destruction by the Chaldeans. That is enough to make the sinners in Zion tremble—that it is *the day of the Lord*, the day in which he will manifest himself by taking vengeance on them. It is *the great day of the Lord*, a specimen of the day of judgment, a kind of doom's-day, as the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is represented to be in our Saviour's prediction concerning it, Matt. xxiv. 27.

I. This *day of the Lord* is here spoken of as very near. The vision is not *for a great while to come*, as those imagine who *put the evil day far from them*. Those deceive themselves who look upon it as a thing at a distance, for *it is near—it is near—it hastens greatly*. The prophet gives the alarm like one that is in earnest, like one that awakens a family with the cry of *Fire! fire!* when it is at the next door that the danger is: “*It is near! it is near!*” and therefore it is high time to bestir yourselves, and do what you can for your own safety before it be too late.” It is madness for those to slumber whose *damnation slumbers not*, and to linger when it hastens.

II. It is spoken of as a very dreadful day. The very *voice of this day of the Lord*, the noise of it, when it is coming, shall be so terrible as to make *the mighty men cry there bitterly*, cry for fear as children do. *It shall be a vexation to hear the report of it*. In the last great day of the Lord the mighty men shall cry bitterly to rocks and mountains to shelter them; but in vain. Observe how emphatically the prophet speaks of this day approaching (v. 15): *It is a day of wrath, God's wrath, wrath in perfection, wrath to the utmost*. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the sinners; they shall be in pain, and shall see no ways of easing or helping themselves. The miseries of the damned are summed up (perhaps with reference to this) in the *indignation and wrath of God*, which are the cause, and the *tribulation and anguish* of the sinner's soul, which are the

effect, Rom. ii. 8, 9. It will be a day of *trouble and distress* to the inhabitants, and a day of *wasteness and desolation* to the whole land; that fruitful land shall be turned into a wilderness. It shall be a *day of darkness and gloominess*; every thing shall look dismal, and there shall not be the least gleam of comfort, or glimpse of hope; look round, and it is all black. It is a *day of clouds and thick darkness*; there is not only nothing encouraging, but every thing threatening; the thick clouds are big with storms and tempests.

III. It is spoken of as a destroying day, v. 16, 17. It shall be destroying, 1. To places, even the strongest and best fortified: *A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities*, to break into them, and against the *high towers*, to bring them down; for what forts, what fences, can hold out against the wrath of God? 2. To persons (v. 17). “*I will bring distress upon men, the strongest and stoutest of men; their hearts and hands shall fail them; they shall walk like blind men, wandering endlessly, because they have sinned against the Lord.*” Note, Those that walk as bad men will justly be left to walk as blind men, always in the dark, in doubt and danger, without any guide or comfort, and falling at length into the ditch. Because they have *sinned against the Lord* he will deliver them into the hands of cruel enemies, that shall *pour out their blood as dust*, so profusely, and with as little regret, and *their flesh* shall be thrown *as dung* upon the dunghill.

IV. The destruction of that day will be unavoidable and universal, v. 18. 1. There shall be no escaping it by ransom: *Neither their silver nor their gold*, which they have hoarded up so covetously against the evil day, or which they have spent so prodigally to make friends for such a time, *shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath*. Another prophet borrowed these words from this, with reference to the same event, Ezek. vii. 19. Note, Riches profit not in the day of wrath, Prov. xi. 4. Nay, riches expose to the wrath of men (Eccl. v. 13), and riches abused to the wrath of God. 2. There shall be no escaping it by flight or concealment; for *the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy*, and where then can a hiding-place be found? See what the fire of God's jealousy is, and what the force of it; it will devour whole lands; how then can particular persons stand before it? He shall make riddance, *a speedy riddance, of all those that dwell in the land*, as the husbandman, when he rids his ground, cuts up all the briars and thorns for the fire. Note, Sometimes the judgments of God make riddance, even utter riddance, with sinful nations, a speedy riddance; their destruction is effected, is completed, in a little time. Let not sinners be laid asleep by the patience of God, for when the measure of their iniquity

is full his justice will both overtake and overcome, will make quick work and thorough work.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. An earnest exhortation to the nation of the Jews to repent and make their peace with God, and so to prevent the judgments threatened before it was too late (ver. 1—3), and this inferred from the revelation of God's wrath against them in the foregoing chapter. II. A denunciation of the judgments of God against several of the neighbouring nations that had assisted, or rejoiced in, the calamity of Israel. 1. The Philistines, ver. 4—7. 2. The Moabites and Ammonites, ver. 8—11. 3. The Ethiopians and Assyrians, ver. 12—15. All these shall drink of the same cup of trembling that is put into the hands of God's people, as was also foretold by other prophets before and after.

**G**ATHER yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; 2 Before the decree bring forth, *before* the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you. 3 Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger.

Here we see what the prophet meant in that terrible description of the approaching judgments which we had in the foregoing chapter. From first to last his design was, not to drive the people to despair, but to drive them to God and to their duty—not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins. In pursuance of that he here calls them to repentance, national repentance, as the only way to prevent national ruin. Observe,

I. The summons given them to a national assembly (v. 1): *Gather yourselves together*. He had told them, in the last words of the foregoing chapter, that God would make a *speedy riddance of all that dwell in the land*, upon which, one would think, it should follow, "Disperse yourselves, and flee for shelter where you can find a place." When the decree had absolutely gone forth for the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that was the advice given (Matt. xxiv. 16), *Then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains*; but here it is otherwise. God warns, that he may not wound, threatens, that he may not strike, and therefore calls to the people to use means for the turning away of his wrath. The summons is given to a *nation not desired*. The word signifies either, 1. *Not desiring*, that has not any desires towards God or the remembrance of his name, is not desirous of his favour or grace, but very indifferent to it, has no mind to repent and reform. "Yet come together, and see if you can stir up desires in one another." Thus God is often found of those that sought him not, nor asked for him, Isa. lvi. 1. Or, 2. *Not desirable*, no ways lovely, nor having any thing in them amiable, or which might recommend them to God. The land of Is-

rael had been a *pleasant land, a land of delight* (Dan. xi. 41); but now it is unlovely, it is a *nation not desired*, to which God might justly say, *Depart from me*; but he says, "Gather together to me, and let us see if any expedient can be found out for the preventing of the ruin. Gather together, that you may in a body humble yourselves before God, may fast, and pray, and seek his face. Gather together, to consult among yourselves what is to be done in this critical juncture, that every one may consider of it, may give and take advice, and speak his mind, and that what is done may be done by consent and so may be a national act." Some read it, "Enquire into yourselves, yea, enquire into yourselves; examine your consciences; look into your hearts; search and try your ways; enquire into yourselves, that you may find out the sin by which God has been provoked to this displeasure against you, and may find out the way of returning to him." Note, When God is contending with us it concerns us to enquire into ourselves.

II. Arguments urged to press them to the utmost seriousness and expedition herein (v. 2): "Do it in earnest; do it with all speed before it is too late, *before the decree bring forth, before the day pass*." The manner of speaking here is very lively and awakening, designed to make them apprehensive, as all sinners are concerned to be, 1. That their danger is very great, that their all lies at stake, that it is a matter of life and death, which therefore well requires and well deserves the closest application of mind that can be. It is not a trifle, and therefore is not a thing to be trifled about. It is the *fierce anger of the Lord* that is kindled against them, and is just ready to kindle upon them, that *devouring fire* which none can dwell with, which none can make head against or hold up their head under. "It is the day of the Lord's anger, the day set for the pouring out of the full vials of it, that you are threatened with, that *great day of the Lord*" spoken of, ch. i. 14. "Are you not concerned to prepare for that day?" 2. That it is very imminent: "Bestir yourselves now quickly, *before the decree bring forth*, and then it will be too late, the opportunity will be lost and never retrieved. The decree is as it were big with child, and it will bring forth the day, the terrible day, which shall pass as chaff; which shall hurry you away into captivity as chaff before the wind." We know not what a day may bring forth (Prov. xxvii. 1), but we do know what the decree will bring forth against impenitent sinners, whom therefore it highly concerns to repent in time, in the *accepted time*. Note, It is the wisdom of those whom God has a controversy with to agree with him quickly, while they are in the way, before his fierce anger comes upon them, not to be turned away. In a case of this nature delays are highly dangerous and may be fatal; they will be so



if by them the heart is hardened. How solicitous should we all be to make our peace with God before the Spirit withdraw from us, or cease to strive with us, before the day of grace be over or the day of life, before our everlasting state shall be determined on the other side of the great gulf fixed!

III. Directions prescribed for the doing of this effectually. It is not enough to gather together in a consternation, but they must seriously and calmly apply to the duty of the day (v. 3): *Seek you the Lord*. That they might find mercy with God, they are here put upon seeking; for so is the rule—*Seek, and you shall find*. A general call was given to the whole nation to *gather together*, but little good is to be expected from the far greater part of them; if the land be saved, it must be by the interest and intercession of the pious few, and therefore to them the exhortation here is particularly directed. And observe, 1. How they are described—they are *the meek of the earth*, or of *the land*. It is the distinguishing character of the people of God that they are the *meek ones of the earth*; this is their badge; it is their livery. They are modest, and humble, and low in their own eyes; they are mild, and gentle, and yielding to others, not soon angry, not very angry, not long angry; they are the *quiet in the land*, Ps. xxxv. 20. And they are subject and submissive to their God, to all his precepts and all his providences. Actuated by this principle and disposition, they have *wrought his judgments*, that is, have obeyed his laws, observed his institutions, have made conscience of their duty to him, and have laid out themselves for the advancement of his honour and interest in the world. 2. What they are required to do; they must *seek*, which denotes both a careful enquiry and a constant endeavour, that they may know and do their duty. (1.) They must *seek the Lord*, seek his favour and grace, address him upon all occasions, ask of him what they need, seek him early, seek him diligently, and continue seeking him. (2.) They must *seek righteousness*. "Seek to God for the performance of his promises to you, and see to it that you abound yet more in duty to him; seek for the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to you, for the graces of God's Spirit to be implanted in you; hunger and thirst after them." (3.) They must *seek meekness*. This is a grace they were so eminent for that they were denominated *the meek of the land*, and yet this they must *seek*. Note, Those that are ever so good must still strive to be better, those that have ever so much grace must be still praying and labouring for more. Nay, those that excel in any particular grace must still seek to excel yet more in that, because in that most assaults will be made upon them by their enemies, in that most is expected from them by their friends, and in that they are most apt to be themselves secure. *Si dixisti*,

*Sufficit, peristi*—Say but, I am all that I ought to be, and you are undone. In the difficult trying times approaching, the meek will find exercise for all the meekness they have, and all little enough, and therefore should seek it earnestly, and pray that when God in his providence gives them occasion for it he would by his grace enable them to exercise it, *to show all meekness to all men*, in all instances, that, *as the day is, so may the strength be*.

IV. Encouragements given to take these directions: *It may be, you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger*. 1. "You particularly that are the *meek of the earth*. Though the day of the Lord's anger do come upon the land, yet you shall be safe, you shall be taken under special protection. *Verily it shall be well with thy remnant*, Jer. xv. 11. *Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey*, Jer. xlv. 5. *I will deliver thee in that day*, Jer. xxxix. 17. *It may be, you shall be hid*; if any be hid, you shall." Good men cannot be sure of temporal preservation, for *all things come alike to all*, but they are most likely to be hid, and stand fairest for a distinguishing care of Providence. It is expressed thus doubtfully to try if they will trust the goodness of God's nature, though they have but the *it may be* of a promise, and to keep up in them a holy fear and watchfulness lest they should seem to come short, and should do any thing to throw themselves out of the divine protection. Note, Those that hold fast their integrity, in times of common iniquity, have reason to hope that God will find out a hiding-place for them, where they shall be safe and easy, in times of common calamity. They shall be hid (as Luther says) *aut in celo, aut sub celo*—either in heaven or under heaven, either in the possession of heaven or under the protection of heaven. Or, 2. "You of this nation, though it be a *nation not desired*, yet, in the day of the Lord's anger with the neighbouring nations, when his judgments are abroad, *you shall be hid*; your land shall be preserved for the sake of those few meek ones that stand in the gap *to turn away the wrath of God*." It concerns us all to make it sure to ourselves that we shall be hid in the great day of God's wrath; and, if we hide ourselves in chambers of duty, God will hide us in chambers of safety, Isa. xxvi. 20. If we prepare an ark, that shall be our hiding-place, Gen. vii. 1.

4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up. 5 Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coasts, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there

shall be no inhabitant. 6 And the sea-coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. 7 And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

The prophet here comes to foretel what share the neighbouring nations should have in the destruction made upon those parts of the world by Nebuchadnezzar and his victorious Chaldees, as others of the prophets did at that time, which is designed, 1. To awaken the people of the Jews, by making them sensible how strong, how deep, how large, the inundation of calamities should be, that the *day of the Lord*, which was near, might appear the more dreadful, and they might thereby be quickened to prepare for it as for a general deluge. 2. To comfort them with this thought, that their case, though sad, should not be singular (*Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris*—*The wretched find it consolatory to have companions of their woe*), and much more with this, that though God had seemed to be their enemy, and to fight against them, yet he was still so far their friend, and an enemy to their enemies, that he resented, and would revenge, the indignities done them.

In these verses we have the doom of the Philistines, who were near neighbours, and old enemies, to the people of Israel. Five lordships there were in that country; only four are here named—*Gaza* and *Ashkelon*, *Ashdod* and *Ekron*; *Gath*, the fifth, is not named, some think because it was now subject to Judah. They were the *inhabitants of the sea-coasts* (v. 5), for their country lay upon the Great Sea. The *nation of the Cherethites* is here joined with them, which bordered upon them (1 Sam. xxx. 14) and fell with them, as is foretold also, Ezek. xxv. 16. The Philistines' land is here called *Canaan*, for it belonged to that country which God gave to his people Israel, and was inserted in the grant made to them, Josh. xiii. 3. This land is yet to be possessed (*five lords of the Philistines*), so that they wrongfully kept Israel out of the possession of it (Judg. iii. 3), which is now remembered against them. For, though the rights of others may be long detained unjustly, the righteous God will at length avenge the wrong.

I. It is here foretold that the Philistines, the usurpers, shall be dispossessed and quite extirpated. In general, here is a woe to them (v. 5), which, coming from God, denotes all misery: *The word of the Lord is against them*—the word of the former prophets, which, though not yet accomplished, will be

in its season, Isa. xiv. 31. This word, now by this prophet, is against them. Note, Those are really in a woeful condition that have the word of the Lord against them, for no word of his shall fall to the ground. Those that rebel against the precepts of God's word shall have the *threatenings* of the word against them. The effect will be no less than their destruction, 1. God himself will be the author of it: *"I will even destroy thee, who can make good what I say and will."* 2. It shall be a universal destruction; it shall extend itself to all parts of the land, both city and country: *Gaza shall be forsaken*, though now a populous city. It was foretold (Jer. xlvii. 6) that *baldness* should come upon Gaza; Alexander the Great razed that city, and we find (Acts viii. 26) that Gaza was a desert. *Ashkelon shall be a desolation*, a pattern of desolation. *Ashdod shall be driven out at noon-day*; in the extremity of the scorching heat they shall have no shade, no shelter to protect them; but then, when most incommoded by the weather, they shall be forced away into captivity, which will be an aggravating circumstance of it. *Ekron* likewise shall be *rooted up*, that had been long taking root. The land of the Philistines shall be dispeopled; *there shall be no inhabitant*, v. 5. God made the earth to be *inhabited* (Isa. xlv. 18), otherwise he would have made it in vain; but, if men do not answer the end of their creation in serving God, it is just with God that the earth should not answer the end of its creation in serving them for a habitation; man's sin has sometimes subjected it to this vanity. 3. It shall be an utter destruction. The sea-coast, which used to be a harbour for ships and a habitation for merchants, shall now be deserted, and be only *cottages for shepherds and folds for flocks* (v. 6), and then perhaps put to better use than when it was possessed by the lords of the Philistines.

II. It is here foretold that the house of Judah, the rightful owners, shall recover the possession of it, v. 7. The remnant of those that shall *return out of captivity*, when God visits them, shall be made to *lie down in safety in the houses of Ashkelon*, to lie down *in the evening*, when they are weary and sleepy. There *they shall feed themselves and their flocks*. Note, God will at length restore his people to their rights, though they may be long kept out from them.

8 I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and magnified *themselves* against their border. 9 Therefore *as I live*, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah,



even the breeding of nettles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them. 10 This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified *themselves* against the people of the LORD of hosts. 11 The LORD *will be* terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and *men* shall worship him, every one from his place, *even* all the isles of the heathen.

The Moabites and Ammonites were both of the posterity of Lot; their countries joined, and, both adjoining to Israel, they are here put together in the prophecy against them.

I. They are both charged with the same crime, and that was reproaching and reviling the people of God and triumphing in their calamities (v. 8): *They have reproached my people*; while God's people kept close to their duty it is probable that they reproached them for the singularities of their religion; and now that they had revolted from God, and fallen under his displeasure, they reproached them for that too. It has been the common lot of God's people in all ages to be reproached and reviled upon one account or other. Thus the old serpent spits his venom; and pride is at the bottom of it; it is in their pride that they have *magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts*, thinking themselves as good as they, as great, and every way as happy. It is the *contempt of the proud* that God's people are filled with, Ps. cxxiii. 4. They have *spoken big* (so some read it, *magna locuti sunt*—*they have spoken great things*) against their border (v. 8), against those of them that bordered upon their country, whom upon all occasions they insulted, or against the property they claimed, which they disputed, or the protection they boasted of, which they ridiculed; they *spoke big against the people of the Lord of hosts* as a deserted abandoned people. *Great swelling words of vanity* are the genuine language of the church's enemies. "But I have heard them" (says God), "and will let you know that I have heard them. I have heard, and I will reckon for them," Jude 15. And, if God hears the reproaches and revilings we are under, it is a good reason why we should be as a *deaf man that hears not*, Ps. xxxviii. 14, 15. Nay, God not only takes notice of, but interests himself in the reproaches cast on his people, because they are his; and it is certain that those who look with disdain upon the people of the Lord of hosts thereby dishonour the Lord of hosts himself. See this very thing charged on Moab and Ammon, Ezek. xxv. 3, 8.

II. They are both laid under the same doom. Associates in iniquity may expect

to be such in desolation. See with what solemnity sentence is pronounced upon them, v. 9. It is *the Lord of hosts*, the sovereign Lord of all, who has authority to pass this sentence and ability to execute it; it is *the God of Israel*, who is jealous for their honour; it is he that has said it, nay, he has sworn it, *As I live, saith the Lord*. The sentence is, 1. That the Moabites and Ammonites shall be quite destroyed; they *shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah*, the marks of whose ruins in the Dead Sea lay near adjoining to the countries of Moab and Ammon; they shall, though not by the same means (even fire from heaven), yet almost in the same manner, be laid waste; not again to be inhabited, or not of a long time. The country shall produce nothing but *nettles*, instead of corn; and there shall be *brine-pits*, instead of the pleasant fountains of water with which the country had abounded. 2. That Israel shall be too hard for them, shall *spoil them* of their goods and *possess* their country by lawful war. Note, Proud men sometimes, by the just judgment of God, fall under the mortification of being trampled upon themselves by those whom once they haughtily trampled upon. And *this shall they have for their pride*.

III. Other nations shall in like manner be humbled, that the Lord alone may be exalted (v. 11): *The Lord will be terrible* unto the Moabites and Ammonites in particular, who have made themselves a terror to his Israel. For, 1. Heathen gods must be abolished. They have long had possession, and their worshippers have both glorified them and gloried in them. But *the Lord will famish all the gods of the earth*, will starve them out of their strong-holds. The Pagans had a fond conceit that their idols were regaled by their offerings, and did *eat the fat of their sacrifices*, Deut. xxxii. 38. *Omnia comesta à Belo—Bel has eaten all*. But it is here promised that when the Christian religion is set up in the world men shall be turned from the service of these dumb idols, shall forsake their altars, and bring no more sacrifices to them, and thus they shall be famished, or *made lean* (as the word is), their priests shall. This intimates the vanity of those idols; it lies in the power of their worshippers to famish them; whereas the true God says, *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee*. It intimates also the victory of the God of Israel over them. *Now know we that he is greater than all gods*. 2. Heathen nations must be converted; when the gospel gets ground, by it men shall be brought to worship him who lives for ever (for that is the command of the everlasting gospel, Rev. xiv. 7), *every one from his place*; they shall not need to go up to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel, but, wherever they are, they may have access to him. *I will that men pray every where*. God shall be worshipped, not only by all the tribes of Israel

and the strangers who join themselves to them, but by all *the isles of the heathen*. This is a promise which looks favourably upon our native country, for it is one of the most considerable of the isles of the Gentiles, by which God will be glorified.

12 Ye Ethiopians also, *ye shall be slain by my sword*. 13 And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, *and dry like a wilderness*. 14 And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; *their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar-work*. 15 This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, *I am*, and *there is none beside me*: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, *and wag his hand*.

The cup is *going round*, when Nebuchadnezzar is going on conquering and to conquer; and not only Israel's near neighbours, but those that lay more remote, must be reckoned with for the wrongs they have done to God's people; the Ethiopians and the Assyrians are here taken to task. 1. The Ethiopians, or Arabians, that had sometimes been a terror to Israel (as in Asa's time, 2 Chron. xiv. 9), must now be reckoned with: *They shall be slain by my sword*, v. 12. Nebuchadnezzar was God's sword, the instrument in his hand with which these and other enemies were subdued and punished, Ps. xvii. 14. 2. The Assyrians, and Nineveh the head city of their monarchy, are next set to the bar, to receive their doom: *He that is God's sword will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria*, and make himself master of it. Assyria had been the rod of God's anger against Israel, and now Babylon is the rod of God's anger against Assyria, Isa. x. 5. *He will make Nineveh a desolation*, as was lately and largely foretold by the prophet Nahum. Observe, (1.) How flourishing Nineveh's state had formerly been (v. 15): *This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly*. Nineveh was so strong that she feared no evil, and therefore dwelt carelessly and set danger at defiance; she was so rich that she thought herself sure of all good, and therefore was a rejoicing city, full of mirth and gaiety; and she had such a dominion that she admitted no rival, but said in her heart, "*I am, and there is none besides me*" that can compare with me, no city in the

world that can pretend to be equal with me." God can with his judgments frighten the most secure, humble the most haughty, and mar the mirth of those that most laugh now. (2.) How complete Nineveh's ruin shall now be; it shall be made a *desolation*, v. 13. Such a heap of ruins shall this once pompous city be that it shall be, [1.] A receptacle for beasts, such a wilderness that *flocks shall lie down in it*; nay, such a waste, desolate, frightful place, that wild beasts, the *beasts of the nations*, all kinds of beasts, shall take up their abode there; the melancholy birds, as the *cormorant and bittern*, shall make their nests in what remains of the houses, as they sometimes do in old ruinous buildings that are uninhabited and unfrequented. The *lintels*, or chapiters of the pillars, the *windows and thresholds*, and all the fine *cedar-work* curiously engraven, shall lie exposed; and on them these rueful ominous birds shall perch, and *their voice shall sing*. How are the songs of mirth turned into hideous horrid noises! What little reason have men to be proud of stately buildings, and rich furniture, when they know not what all the pomp of them may come to at last! [2.] A derision to travellers. Those that had come from far, to gratify their curiosity with the sight of Nineveh's splendour, shall now look on her with as much contempt as ever they looked upon her with admiration (v. 15): *Every one that passes by shall hiss at her, and wag his hand*, making light of her desolations, nay, and making sport with them—"There is an end of proud Nineveh." They shall not weep, and wring their hands (the adversities of those are unpitied and unlamented who were insolent and haughty in their prosperity), but they shall *hiss and wag their hands*, forgetting that perhaps their own ruin is not far off.

## CHAP. III.

We now return to Jerusalem, and must again hear what God has to say to her, 1. By way of reproof and threatening, for the abundance of wickedness that was found in her, of which divers instances are given, with the aggravations of them, ver. 1-7. 11 By way of promise of mercy and grace, which God had yet in reserve for them. Two general heads of promises here are,—1. That God would bring in a glorious work of reformation among them, cleanse them from their sins, and bring them home to himself; many promises of this kind here are, ver. 8-13. 2. That he would bring about a glorious work of salvation for them, when he had thus prepared them for it, ver. 14-20. Thus the "Redeemer shall come to Zion," and, to clear his own way, shall "turn away ungodliness from Jacob." These promises were to have their full accomplishment in gospel-times and gospel-graces.

**W**OE to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! 2 She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God. 3 Her princes within her *are* roaring lions; her judges *are* evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. 4 Her prophets *are* light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted



the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law. 5 The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame. 6 I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. 7 I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

One would wonder that Jerusalem, the holy city, where God was known, and his name was great, should be the city of which this black character is here given, that a place which enjoyed such abundance of the means of grace should become so very corrupt and vicious, and that God should permit it to be so; yet so it is, to show that *the law made nothing perfect*; but if this be the true character of Jerusalem, as no doubt it is (for God's judgments will make none worse than they are), it is no wonder that the prophet begins with *woe to her*. For the holy God hates sin in those that are nearest to him, nay, in them he hates it most. A sinful state is, and will be, a woeful state.

I. Here is a very bad character given of the city in general. How has the faithful city become a harlot! 1. She shames herself; she is *filthy and polluted* (v. 1), has made herself *infamous* (so some read it), *the gluttonous city* (so the margin), always cramming, and making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it. Sin is the filthiness and pollution of persons and places, and makes them odious in the sight of the holy God. 2. She wrongs her neighbours and inhabitants; she is *the oppressing city*. Never any place had *statutes and judgments so righteous* as this city had, and yet, in the administration of the government, never was more unrighteousness. 3. She is very provoking to her God, and in every respect walks contrary to him, v. 2. He had given his law, and spoken to her by his servants the prophets, telling her what was the good she should do and what the evil she should avoid; but *she obeyed not his voice*, nor made conscience of doing as he commanded her, in any thing. He had taken her under an excellent discipline, both of the word and of the rod; but she did not receive the instruction of the one nor the correction of the other, did not submit to God's will nor answer his end in either. He encouraged her to depend upon him, and his power and

promise, for deliverance from evil and supply with good; but she *trusted not in the Lord*; her confidence was placed in her alliances with the nations more than in her covenant with God. He gave her tokens of his presence, and instituted ordinances of communion for her with himself; but she *drew not near to her God*, did not meet him where he appointed and where he promised to meet her. She stood at a distance, and *said to the Almighty, Depart*.

II. Here is a very bad character of the leading men in it; those that should by their influence suppress vice and profaneness there are the great patterns and patrons of wickedness, and those that should be her physicians are really her worst disease. 1. *Her princes are ravenous and barbarous as roaring lions* that make a prey of all about them, and they are universally feared and hated; they use their power for destruction, and not for edification. 2. *Her judges, who should be the protectors of injured innocence, are evening wolves*, rapacious and greedy, and their cruelty and covetousness both insatiable: *They gnaw not the bones till the morning*; they take so much delight and pleasure in cruelty and oppression that when they have devoured a good man they reserve the bones, as it were, for a sweet morsel, to be gnawed the next morning, Job xxxi. 31. 3. *Her prophets, who pretend to be special messengers from heaven to them, are light and treacherous persons*, fanciful, and of a vain imagination, frothy and airy, and of a loose conversation, men of no consistency with themselves, in whom one can put no confidence. They were so given to bantering that it was hard to say when they were serious. Their pretended prophecies were all a sham, and they secretly laughed at those that were deluded by them. 4. *Her priests, who are teachers by office and have the charge of the holy things, are false to their trust and betray it*. They were to preserve the purity of the *sanctuary*, but they did themselves *pollute* it, and the sacred offices of it, which they were to attend upon—such priests as Hophni and Phinehas, who by their wicked lives *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*. They were to expound and apply *the law*, and to judge according to it; but, in their explications and applications of it, they *did violence to the law*; they corrupted the sense of it, and perverted it to the patronising of that which was directly contrary to it. By forced constructions, they made the law to speak what they pleased, to serve a turn, and so, in effect, *made void the law*.

III. We have here the aggravations of this general corruption of all orders and degrees of men in Jerusalem.

1. They had the tokens of God's presence among them, and all the advantages that could be of knowing his will, with the strongest inducements possible to do it, and

yet they persisted in their disobedience, *v. 5.* (1.) They had the honour and privilege of the Shechinah, God's dwelling in their land, so as he dwelt not with any other people: "*The just Lord is in the midst of thee*, to take cognizance of all thou doest amiss and give countenance to all thou doest well; he is in the midst of thee as a holy God, and therefore thy pollutions are the more offensive, Deut. xxiii. 14. He is in the midst of you as a just God, and therefore will punish the affronts you put upon him, and the wrongs and injuries you do to one another." (2.) They had God's own example set before them, in the discovery he made of himself to them, that they might conform to it: "*He will not do iniquity*, and therefore you should not;" for this was the great rule of their institution, "*Be you holy, for I am holy*. God will be true to you; he not you then false to him." (3.) He sent to them his prophets, rising up early and sending them: "*Every morning he brings his judgment to light*, as duly as the morning comes; *he fails not*. He shows them plainly what the good is which he requires of them, and puts them in mind of it; *he wakens morning by morning* (Isa. l. 4), wakens his prophets with the rising sun, to bring to light the things which belong to their peace. So that, upon the whole matter, what more could have been done to his vineyard, to make it fruitful? Isa. v. 4. And yet, after all, *the unjust know no shame*; those that have been unjust are unjust still, and are not ashamed of their unrighteousness, *neither can they blush*. If they had any sense of honour, any shame left in them, they would not go so directly contrary to their profession and to the instructions given them. But those that are past shame are past cure.

2. God had set before their eyes some remarkable monuments of his justice, which were designed for warning to them (*v. 6*): "*I have cut off the nations*, the seven nations of Canaan, which the land spewed out for their wickedness, upon which they had this caution given them, to take heed lest it *spew them out also*, Lev. xviii. 28. Or it may refer to some of the neighbouring nations that were made desolate for their wickedness, especially to the nations of Israel, the ten tribes. *Their towers were desolate*, their high towers, their strong towers, their pride and power broken; *their streets were wasted*, so that none passed along through them; *their cities were destroyed* and laid in ruins; *no man was to be found in them*, *no inhabitant*, all were slain or carried into captivity. The enemies did it, but God avows it: *I cut them off*, says he. And God designed this for an admonition to Jerusalem (Ezek. xxiii. 9, 11): "*I said, Surely thou wilt fear me*; surely these judgments upon others will deter thee from the like wicked practices; *surely thou wilt receive instruction* by these providences; it ought reasonably to be ex-

pected that thou wouldst not continue to sin like the nations when thou seest the ruin which their sin brought upon them." They could not but see their own house in danger when their neighbour's was on fire; and, when we are frightened, God should be feared.

3. He had set before them life and death, good and evil, both in his word and in his providence. (1.) He had assured them of the continuance of their prosperity if they would fear him and receive instruction, for so *their dwelling would not be cut off* as their neighbour's was; if they took the warning given them, and reformed, what was past should be pardoned, and their tranquillity lengthened out. (2.) He had made them feel the smart of the rod, though he reprieved them from the sword: *Howsoever I punished them*, that, being chastened, they might not be condemned. Such various methods did God take with them, to reclaim them, but all in vain; they were not won upon by gentle methods, nor had severe ones any effect, for *they rose early, and corrupted all their doings*; they were more resolute and eager in their wicked courses than ever, more studious and solicitous in making provision for their lusts, and let slip no opportunity for the gratification of them. *God rose up early*, to send them his *prophets*, to reduce and reclaim them, but they were *up before him*, to shut and bolt the door against them. Their wickedness was universal: *All their doings were corrupted*; and it was all owing to themselves; they could not lay the blame upon the tempter, but they alone must bear it; they themselves wilfully and designedly *corrupted all their doings*; for *every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed*.

8 Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. 9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent. 10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, *even* the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. 11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be



haughty because of my holy mountain. 12 I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. 13 The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

Things looked very bad with Jerusalem in the foregoing verses; she has got into a very bad name, and seems to be incorrigible, incurable, mercy-proof and judgment-proof. Now one would think it should follow, 'Therefore expect no other but that she should be utterly abandoned and rejected as *reprobate silver*; since they will not be wrought upon by prophets or providences, let them be made a desolation as their neighbours have been. But behold and wonder at the riches of divine grace, which takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious. 'They still grew worse and worse, *therefore wait you upon me, saith the Lord, v. 8.* "Since the law, it seems, will make nothing perfect, the bringing in of a better hope shall. Let those that lament the corruptions of the church wait upon God, till he send his Son into the world, to save his people from their sins, till he send his gospel to reform and refine his church, and to purify to himself a peculiar people both of Jews and Gentiles." And there were those who, according to this direction and encouragement, waited for redemption, for this redemption in Jerusalem; and long-looked-for came at last, Luke ii. 38. *For judgment Christ will come into this world, John ix. 39.*

I. To avenge what has been done amiss against his church, to bring down and destroy the enemies of it, its spiritual enemies, of which the destruction of Babylon, and other oppressors of God's people, in the Old-Testament times, was a type, and would be a happy presage. He will rise up to the prey, to lead captivity captive (Ps. lxxviii. 18), to conquer and spoil the powers of darkness, and the powers on earth that set themselves against the Lord and his anointed; he will break them with a rod of iron (Ps. ii. 5, 9; xi. 5, 6); his determination is to gather the nations and to assemble the kingdoms. By the gospel of Christ preached to every creature all nations are summoned, as it were, to appear in a body before the Lord Jesus, who is about to set up his kingdom in the world. But, since the greatest part of mankind will not obey the summons, he will pour upon them his indignation, for he that believes not is condemned already. At the time of the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah, there shall be on earth distress of nations with perplexity (Luke xxi. 25), great

tribulation, such as *never was, nor ever shall be*, Matt. xxiv. 21. Then God pours upon the nations his indignation, even all his fierce anger, for their indignation and fierce anger against the Messiah and his kingdom, Ps. ii. 1, 2. Then all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of his jealousy; both Jews and Gentiles shall be reckoned with for their enmity to the gospel. Principalities and powers shall be spoiled, and made a show of openly, and the victorious Redeemer shall triumph over them. The end of those that continue to be of the earth, and to mind earthly things, after God has set up the kingdom of heaven among men, shall be destruction (Phil. iii. 19); they shall be devoured with the fire of God's jealousy.

II. To amend what he finds amiss in his church. When God intends the restoration of Israel, and the revival of their peace and prosperity, he makes way for the accomplishment of his purpose by their reformation and the revival of their virtue and piety; for this is God's method, both with particular persons and with communities, first to make them holy and then to make them happy. These promises were in part accomplished after the return of the Jews out of Babylon, when by their captivity they were thoroughly cured of their idolatry; and this was all the fruit, even the taking away of sin. But they look further, to the blessed effects of the gospel and the grace of it, to those times of reformation in which we live, Heb. ix. 10.

1. It is premised that there shall be a reformation in men's discourse, which had been generally corrupt, but should now be with grace seasoned with salt (v. 9): "Then will I turn to the people a pure language; I will turn the people to such a language from that evil communication which has almost ruined all good manners among them." Note, Converting grace refines the language, not by making the phrases witty, but the substance wise. Among the Jews, after the captivity, there needed a reformation of the dialect, for they had mingled the language of Canaan with that of Ashdod (Neh. xiii. 24), and that grievance shall be redressed. But that is not all: their language shall be purified from all profaneness, filthiness, and falsehood. I will turn them to a choice language (so some read it); they shall not speak rashly, but with caution and deliberation; they shall choose out their words. Note, An air of purity and piety in common conversation is a very happy omen to any people; other graces, other blessings, shall be given where God gives a pure language to those who have been a people of unclean lips.

2. That the worship of God, according to his will, shall be more closely applied to, and more unanimously concurred in. Instead of sacrifice and incense, they shall call upon the name of the Lord. Prayer is the spiritual offering with which God must be honoured;

and, to prepare and fit us for that duty, it is necessary that we have a *pure language*. We are utterly unfit to take God's name into our lips, unless they be pure lips. The purifying of the language in common conversation is necessary to the acceptableness of the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart in our devotion; for how can *sweet waters and bitter come out of the same fountain*? James iii. 9—12. It is likewise promised that their language being thus purified they shall serve God *with one consent*, with *one shoulder* (so the word is), alluding to oxen in the yoke, that draw even. When Christians are unanimous in the service of God the work goes on cheerfully. This is the effect of the pure language, purified from passion, envy, and censoriousness. Note, Purity is the way to unity; the reformation of manners is the way to a comprehension. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable.*

3. That those that were driven from God shall return to him and be accepted of him (v. 10): *From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*, that is, from Egypt (so described, Isa. xviii. 1) or from some other very remote country—*my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring my offering*. Those that by reason of their distance had almost forgotten God, and their obligations to him, shall be put in mind of him, as the prodigal son was of his father's house, in the far country. Those that by reason of their dispersion, under the tokens of his displeasure, might be afraid of coming to him, yet even they shall be gathered under his wings; the *daughter of his dispersed*, that is *as far off*, will be found among those whom *the Lord our God shall call*; and, though they are dispersed, he will own them for his; his calling them *my dispersed* puts honour upon them, sufficient to counterbalance all the disgrace of their dispersion. These shall come, (1.) With their humble petitions: They are *my suppliants*. Note, True converts are suppliants to God; they do not plead, but *make supplication to their Judge* (Job ix. 15); and wherever they are, though *beyond the rivers of Ethiopia*, a great way off from his house of prayer, he has his eye upon them and his ear open to them; they are his suppliants. (2.) With their spiritual sacrifices: *They shall bring my offering*, shall bring themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God (Rom. xii. 1); the conversion of the Gentiles is called *the offering up of the Gentiles* (Rom. xv. 16); and with themselves they shall bring the gospel-sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, with which God is well pleased.

4. That sin and sinners shall be purged out from among them, v. 11. God will take away, (1.) Their just reproach: *In that day shall thou not be ashamed for all thy doings*. They shall be ashamed as penitents, and shall continue to be so (see Ezek. xvi. 63), but they shall not be ashamed as sinners that

return to folly again. *"Thou shalt not be ashamed, that is, thou shalt no more do a shameful thing, as thou hast done."* The guilt of sin being taken away by pardoning mercy, the reproach of it shall be rolled away from the sinner's sown conscience, that being *purified, and pacified, and cleansed from dead works*. When wickedness and wicked people abound in a nation those few in it that are good are ashamed of them and of their land; but when sinners are converted, and the land reformed, that shame and the cause of it are removed. (2.) Their unjust glorying: *"I will take away out of the midst of thee, not only the profane, who are a shame to thy land, but the hypocrites, who appear beautiful outwardly, and rejoice in thy pride, in the holy city, the holy house."* These were indeed Israel's glory, but they made them their pride, and rejoiced in them, as if they were an invincible bulwark to secure them in their sinful ways; they relied on them as their righteousness and strength, boasting of *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord* (Jer. vii. 4); they were *haughty because of the holy mountain*, were conceited of themselves, scornful of others, and set even the judgments of God at defiance. Note, Church-privileges, when they are not duly improved as they ought to be, are often made the matter of men's pride and the ground of their security. But that haughtiness is the most offensive to God which is supported and fed by the pretensions of holiness. This God will silence and take away.

5. That God will have a remnant of holy, humble, serious people among them, that shall have the comfort of their relation to him and interest in him (v. 12): *I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people*. When the Chaldeans carried away the Jews into captivity they left *of the poor of the land for vine-dressers and husbandmen*, a type and figure of God's distinguished remnant, whom he sets apart for himself. They are *afflicted and poor*, low in the world; such *God has chosen*, James ii. 5. The poor are evangelized, low in their own eyes, afflicted for sin, poor in spirit. They are God's leaving, for it is a remnant according to the election of grace. *I have reserved them to myself*, says God (Rom. xi. 4, 5), and *they shall trust in the name of the Lord*. Note, Those whom God designs for the glory of his name he enables to trust in his name; and the greater their affliction and poverty in the world are the more reason they see to trust in God, having nothing else to trust to, 1 Tim. v. 5.

6. That this select remnant shall be blessed with purity and peace, v. 13. (1.) They shall be blessed with purity, both in words and actions: *They shall neither do iniquity nor speak lies*. Justice and veracity shall command them and govern them, though they be ever so much against their secular interest. They shall not only not speak a direct



deliberate lie, but *there shall not be a deceitful tongue found in their mouth*, not in the mouth of any of them; not the least equivocation shall come from them. (2.) They shall be blessed with peace. They shall, as the sheep of God's pasture, *feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid*. They shall not be fearful themselves, nor shall any about them be frightful to them. Note, Those that are careful not to do iniquity need not be afraid of any calamity, for it cannot hurt them, and therefore should not terrify them.

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. 15 The LORD hath taken a way thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, *even the LORD, is* in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: *and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack*. 17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee *is* mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. 18 I will gather *them that are sorrowful* for the solemn assembly, *who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden*. 19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. 20 At that time will I bring you *again*, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

After the promises of the taking away of sin, here follow promises of the taking away of trouble; for when the cause is removed the effect will cease. What makes a people holy will make them happy of course. The precious promises here made to the purified people were to have their full accomplishment in the comforts of the gospel, in the hope, and much more in the enjoyment, of which, they are here called upon, 1. To rejoice and sing (v. 14): *Sing, O daughter of Zion! sin for joy; shout, O Israel! in a holy transport and exultation; be glad and rejoice with all the heart*; let the joy be inward, let it be great. Those that love God

with all their heart have occasion with all their heart to rejoice in him. It was promised (v. 13) that their sins should be mortified and their fears silenced, and then follows, *Sing and rejoice*. Note, Those that reform have cause to rejoice, whereas Israel cannot rejoice for joy as other people, while she goes a whoring from her God. God's promises, applied by faith, furnish the saints with constant and abundant matter for joy; they are filled with joy and peace in believing them. 2. To throw off all their discouragements (v. 16): *In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem* (God will say it by his prophets, by his providences, their neighbours shall say it, they shall say it to one another), "*Fear thou not*, be not disposed to fear, do not easily admit the impressions of it; when things are bad, fear not their being worse, but hope they will mend; frighten not thyself upon every occasion. *Let not thy hands be slack or faint*; wring not thy hands in despair; drop not thy hands in despondency; disist not thyself for thy work and warfare by giving way to doubts and fears. Pluck up thy spirits, and, in token of that, lift up thy hands, the *hands that hung down*, Heb. xii. 12; Isa. xxxv. 3. Lift up thy hands in prayer to God; lift up thy hands to help thyself." Fear makes the hands slack, but faith and hope make them vigorous, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength both for doing and suffering.

Let us now see what these precious promises are which are here made to the people of God, for the banishing of their griefs and fears and the encouraging of their hopes and joys; and to us are these promises made as well as to them.

I. An end shall be put to all their troubles and distresses (v. 15): "*The Lord has taken away thy judgments*, has removed all the calamities thou hast been groaning under, which were the punishments of thy sin; the noise of war shall be silenced, the reproach of famine done away, and the captivity brought back. Though some grievances remain, they shall be only afflictions, and not judgments, for sin shall be pardoned. *He has cast out thy enemy*, that has thrust himself into thy land, and triumphed over thee. *He has swept out thy enemy*" (so some read it), "as dirt is swept out of the house to the dunghill." When they sweep out their sins with the besom of reformation God will sweep out their enemies with the besom of destruction. If they should need correction, they shall fall into the hands of the Lord, whose mercies are great, and shall not again fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel: "*Thou shalt not see evil any more*, not such evil days as thou hast seen." Note, The way to get clear of the evil of trouble is to keep clear from the evil of sin; and to those that do so trouble has no real evil in it.

II. God will give them the tokens of his



presence with them; though he has long seemed to stand at a distance (they having provoked him to withdraw), he will make it to appear that he is *with them of a truth*: "*The Lord is in the midst of thee, O Zion! of thee, O Jerusalem!*" as the sun in the centre of the universe, to diffuse his light and influence upon every part. He is *in the midst of thee*, to preside in all thy affairs and to take care of all thy interests." And, 1. "He is the *King of Israel* (v. 15) and is in the midst of thee as a king in the midst of his people." With an eye to this, our Lord Jesus is called the *King of Israel* (John i. 49); and he is, and will be, in the midst of his church always, even to the end of the world, to receive the homage of his subjects, and to give out his favours to them, even *where but two or three are gathered together in his name*. 2. "He is the Lord thy God, thine in covenant, and he is in the midst of thee as thy God, whom thou hast an interest in and whose own thou art. He has put himself into dear relations to thee, laid himself by promise under obligations to thee, and, that thou mayest have abundant comfort in both, he is *in the midst of thee*, nigh at hand to answer both." 3. "He that is in the midst of thee as thy God and King is *mighty*, is almighty, is able to do all that for thee that thou needest and canst desire." 4. "He has engaged his power for thy succour: *He will save. He will be Jesus*, will answer the name, for he will save his people from their sins."

III. God will take delight in them, and in doing them good. The expressions of this are very lively and affecting (v. 17): *He will rejoice over thee with joy*, will not only be well pleased with thee, upon thy repentance and reformation, and take thee into favour, but will take a complacency in thee, as the bridegroom does in his bride, or the bride in her ornaments, Isa. lxii. 3—5. The conversion of sinners and the consolation of saints are the joy of angels, for they are the joy of God himself. The church should be the *joy of the whole earth* (Ps. xlviii. 2), for it is the joy of the whole heaven. He will *rest in his love*, will be *silent in his love*, so the word is. "I will not rebuke thee as I have done, for thy sins; I will acquiesce in thee, and in my relation to thee." I know not where there is the like expression of Christ's love to his church, unless in that song of songs, Cant. iv. 9, *Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of thy eyes. O the condescensions of divine grace!* 'The great God not only loves his saints, but he loves to love them, is pleased that he has pitched upon these objects of his love. He *will joy over them with singing*. He that is grieved for the sin of sinners rejoices in the graces and services of the saints, and is ready to express that joy by singing over them. *The Lord takes pleasure in those that fear him*, and in them Jesus Christ will shortly be glorified and admired.

IV. God will comfort Zion's mourners, who sympathize with her in her griefs, and will wipe away their tears (v. 18): *I will gather those who are sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, to whom the reproach of it was a burden*. See, 1. Who those are whom God will rejoice in and make to rejoice. They are such as are sorrowful. Those only must expect to reap in joy that sow in tears. The sorrowful now shall be for ever joyful. 2. What is the great matter of sorrow to Zion's mourners, when Zion is in mourning. Many are her calamities. The city is ruined, and the palaces are demolished; trade is at an end, and the administration of public justice; but all these are nothing to them in comparison with the desolations of the sanctuary, the destruction of the temple and the altar, to attend on which, in solemn feasts, all Israel used to come together three times a year. It is for those sacred solemn assemblies that they are sorrowful, (1.) Because they are dispersed; there is no temple to come up to, or, if there were, no people to come up to it; so that the *solemn feasts and sabbaths are forgotten in Zion*, Lam. ii. 6. Note, The restraining of public assemblies for religious worship, the scattering of them by their enemies, or the forsaking of them by their friends, so that either there are no assemblies or not solemn ones, is a very sorrowful thing to all good people. If *the ways of Zion mourn*, the sons of Zion mourn too. And hereby they make it to appear that they are indeed of Zion, living members of that body with the grievances of which they are so sensibly affected. (2.) Because they are despised; the reproach of the solemn assemblies is a burden to them. It had been the lot of the solemn assemblies to lie under a great deal of reproach, Satan and his instruments having a particular spite at them, as the great support of the interest of God's kingdom among men. Black and odious characters have been put upon those assemblies; and this is a burden to all those that have a cordial concern for the glory of God and the welfare of the souls of men. They reckon that the reproaches of those who reproach the solemn assemblies fall upon them, fall foul upon them.

V. God will recover the captives out of the hands of their oppressors, and bring home the banished that seemed to be expelled, v. 19, 20. 1. Their enemies shall be disabled to detain them in bondage: "*At that time I will undo all that afflict thee*, will break their power, and blast their counsels, so that they shall be forced to surrender the prey they have taken." *Conficium—I will take them to task*; "I will be doing with them shortly, and so as to make an end of them." Note, Those that abuse and oppress God's people take the ready way to undo themselves. 2. They shall be enabled to assert and recover their liberty, and all the difficulties in the way of it shall be surmounted.



Is the church weak and wounded? *I will save her that halts*, as was promised, Mic. iv. 7. He will help her when she cannot help herself; even *the lame shall take the prey*, Isa. xxxiii. 23. Is she dispersed, and not likely to incorporate for her common benefit? *I will gather her that was driven out, and bring her again at the time that I gather her*. One act of mercy and grace shall serve both to collect them out of their dispersions and to conduct them to their own land. When *the people's hearts are prepared*, the work will be done suddenly; and who can hinder it if God undertake to effect it? "*I will turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord*"; you shall plainly discern the hand of God in it, and say, *This is the Lord's doing*."

VI. God will by all this put honour upon them and gain them respect from all about them. Israel was at first *made high above all nations in praise and fame*, Deut. xxvi. 19. The reproach brought upon them was therefore one of the sorest of their grievances (nothing cuts deeper to those that are in honour than disgrace does); and therefore when God returns, in mercy, to his church, it is here promised that she shall regain her credit; all the reproach shall be for ever rolled way, as Israel's at Gilgal, Josh. v. 9. The church shall be as honourable as ever she

has been despicable. 1. Even those that reproached her shall be made to respect her: "*I will get them praise and fame in every land, where they have been put to shame*, that the same who were the witnesses of their disgrace may see cause to change their mind concerning them." Those that said, "*This is Zion whom no man looks after*," shall say, "*This is Zion whom the great God looks after*." And she that was looked upon to be the *offscouring of the earth* now appears to be the darling of heaven. 2. Even those that never knew her shall be brought to honour her (v. 20): *I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth*. So the Jewish church was when the *fear of the Jews* fell upon their neighbours (Esth. viii. 17), and some of all nations said, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech. viii. 23. So the Christian church was when it was made to flourish in the world, for there is that in it which may justly recommend it to the value and esteem of all the people of the earth. And so the universal church of the first-born will be in the great day, when the saints shall be brought together to Christ, that he may be admired and glorified in them, and they admired and glorified in him before angels and men. Then will God's Israel be *made a name and a praise to eternity*.

## AN

## EXPOSITION,

## WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

## OF THE PROPHECY OF

## H A G G A I.

THE captivity in Babylon gave a very remarkable turn to the affairs of the Jewish church both in history and prophecy. It is made a signal epocha in our Saviour's genealogy, Matt. i. 17. Nine of the twelve minor prophets, whose oracles we have been hitherto consulting, lived and preached before that captivity, and most of them had an eye to it in their prophecies, foretelling it as the just punishment of Jerusalem's wickedness. But the last three (in whom the Spirit of prophecy took its period, until it revived in Christ's forerunner) lived and preached after the return out of captivity, not immediately upon it, but some time after. Haggai and Zechariah appeared much about the same time, eighteen years after the return, when the building of the temple was both retarded by its enemies and neglected by its friends. Then the prophets, *Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them* (so we read Ezra v. 1), to reprove them for their remissness, and to encourage them to revive that good work when it had stood still for some time, and to go on with it vigorously, notwithstanding the opposition they met with in it. Haggai began two months before Zechariah, who was raised up to second him, that out of the mouth of two witnesses the word might be established. But Zechariah continued longer at the work; for all Haggai's pro-

phesies that are recorded were delivered within four months, in the second year of Darius, between the beginning of the sixth month and the end of the ninth. But we have Zechariah's prophecies dated above two years after, Zech. vii. 1. Some have the honour to lead, others to last, in the work of God. The Jews ascribe to these two prophets the honour of being members of the great synagogue (as they call it), which was formed after the return out of captivity; we think it more certain, and it was their honour, and a much greater honour, that they prophesied of Christ. Haggai spoke of him as the *glory of the latter house*, and Zechariah as *the man, the branch*. In them the light of that morning star shone more brightly than in the foregoing prophecies, as they lived nearer the time of the rising of the Sun of righteousness, and now began to see his day approaching. The LXX. make Haggai and Zechariah to be the penmen of Ps. cxxxviii. and of Ps. cxlvi., cxlvii., and cxlviii.

### CHAP. I.

In this chapter, after the preamble of the prophecy, we have, I. A reproof of the people of the Jews for their dilatoriness and slothfulness in building the temple, which had provoked God to contend with them by the judgment of famine and scarcity, with an exhortation to them to resume that good work and to prosecute it in good earnest, ver. 1—11. II. The good success of this sermon, appearing in the people's return and close application to that work, wherein the prophet, in God's name, animated and encouraged them, assuring them that God was with them, ver. 12—15.

**I**N the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedeck, the high priest, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built. 3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 *Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?* 5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes. 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. 10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit. 11 And I called for

a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

It was the complaint of the Jews in Babylon that they *saw not their signs*, and there was *no more any prophet* (Ps. lxxiv. 9), which was a just judgment upon them for mocking and misusing the prophets. We read of no prophets they had in their return, as they had in their coming out of Egypt, Hos. xii. 13. God stirred them up immediately by his Spirit to exert themselves in that escape (Ezra i. 5); for, though God makes use of prophets, he needs them not, he can do his work without them. But the lamp of Old-Testament prophecy shall yet make some bright and glorious efforts before it expire; and Haggai is the first that appears under the character of a special messenger from heaven, when the *word of the Lord* had been long *precious* (as when prophecy began, 1 Sam. iii. 1) and *there had been no open vision*. In the reign of Darius Hystaspes, the third of the Persian kings, in the second year of his reign, this prophet was sent; and the word of the Lord came to him, and came by him to the leading men among the Jews, who are here named, v. 1. The chief governor, 1. In the state; that was Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, of the house of David, who was commander-in-chief of the Jews, in their return out of captivity. 2. In the church; and that was Joshua the son of Josedeck, who was now high priest. They were great men and good men, and yet were to be stirred up to their duty when they grew remiss. What the people also were faulty in they must be told of, that they might use their power and interest for the mending of it. The prophets, who were extraordinary messengers, did not go about to set aside the ordinary institutions of magistracy and ministry, but endeavoured to render both more effectual for the ends to which they were appointed, for both ought to be supported. Now observe,

I. What the sin of the Jews was at this time, v. 2. As soon as they came up out of



captivity they set up an altar for sacrifice, and within a year after laid the foundations of a temple, Ezra iii. 10. They then seemed very forward in it, and it was likely enough that the work would be done suddenly; but, being served with a prohibition some time after from the Persian court, and charged not to go on with it, they not only yielded to the force, when they were actually under it, which might be excused, but afterwards, when the violence of the opposition had abated, they continued very indifferent to it, had no spirit nor courage to set about it again, but seemed glad that they had a pretence to let it stand still. Though those who are employed for God may be driven off from their work by a storm, yet they must return to it as soon as the storm is over. These Jews did not do so, but continued loitering until they were afresh reminded of their duty. And that which they suggested one to another was, *The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built*; that is, 1. "Our time has not come for the doing of it, because we have not yet recovered, after our captivity; our losses are not repaired, nor have we yet got before-hand in the world. It is too great an undertaking for new beginners in the world, as we are; let us first get our own houses up, before we talk of building churches, and in the mean time let a bare altar serve us, as it did our father Abraham." They did not say that they would not build a temple at all, but, "Not yet; it is all in good time." Note, Many a good work is put by by being put off, as Felix put off the prosecution of his convictions to a more convenient season. They do not say that they will never repent, and reform, and be religious, but, "Not yet." And so the great business we were sent into the world to do is not done, under pretence that it is all in good time to go about it. 2. God's time has not come for the doing of it; for (say they) the restraint laid upon us by authority in a legal way is not broken off, and therefore we ought not to proceed, though there be a present connivance of authority." Note, There is an aptness in us to misinterpret providential discouragements in our duty, as if they amounted to a discharge from our duty, when they are only intended for the trial and exercise of our courage and faith. It is bad to neglect our duty, but it is worse to vouch Providence for the patronising of our neglects.

II. What the judgments of God were by which they were punished for this neglect, v. 6, 9—11. They neglected the building of God's house, and put that off, that they might have time and money for their secular affairs. They desired to be excused from such an expensive piece of work under this pretence, that they must provide for their families; their children must have meat and portions too, and, until they have got before-hand in the world, they cannot think of re-

building the temple. Now, that the punishment might answer to the sin, God by his providence kept them still behind-hand, and that poverty which they thought to prevent by not building the temple God brought upon them for not building it. They were sensible of the smart of the judgment, and every one complained of the unseasonable weather, the great losses they sustained in their corn and cattle, and the decay of trade; but they were not sensible of the cause of the judgment, and the ground of God's controversy with them. They did not, or would not, see and own that it was for their putting off the building of the temple that they lay under these manifest tokens of God's displeasure; and therefore God here gives them notice that this is that for which he contended with them. Note, We need the help of God's prophets and ministers to expound to us, not only the judgments of God's mouth, but the judgments of his hands, that we may understand his mind and meaning in his rod as well as in his word, to discover to us not only wherein we have offended God, but wherein God shows himself offended at us. Let us observe,

1. How God contended with them. He did not send them into captivity again, nor bring a foreign enemy upon them, as they deserved, but took the correcting of them into his own hands; for his mercies are great. (1.) He that gives seed to the sower denied his blessing upon the seed sown, and then it never prospered; they had nothing, or next to nothing, from it. *They sowed much* (v. 6), kept a great deal of ground in tillage, which, they might expect, would turn to a better advantage than usual, because their land had long lain fallow and had enjoyed its sabbaths. Having sown much, they looked for much from it, enough to spend and enough to spare too; but they were disappointed: *They bring in little*, very little (v. 6); when they have made the utmost of it, it comes to little (v. 9); it did not yield as they expected. Isa. v. 10, *The seed of a homer shall yield an ephah*, a bushel's sowing shall yield a peck. Note, Our expectations from the creature are often most frustrated when they are most raised; and then, when we look for much, it comes to little, that our expectation may be from God only, in whom it will be outdone. We are here told how they came to be disappointed (v. 10): *The heaven over you is stayed from dew*; he that has the key of the clouds in his hands shut them up, and withheld the rain when the ground called for it, the former or the latter rain, and then of course *the earth is stayed from her fruit*; for, if the heaven be as brass, the earth is as iron. The corn perhaps came up very well, and promised a very plentiful crop, but, for want of the dews at earing-time, it never filled, but was parched with the heat of the sun and withered away. The restored captives, who had long been kept bare in Babylon,



thought they should never want when they had got their own land in possession again and had that at command. But what the better are they for it, unless they had the clouds at command too? God will make us sensible of our necessary and constant dependence upon him, throughout all the links in the chain of second causes, from first to last; so that we can at no time say, "Now we have no further occasion for God and his providence." See Hos. ii. 21. But God not only withheld the cooling rains, but he appointed the scorching heats (v. 11): *I called for a drought upon the land*, ordered the weather to be extremely hot, and then the fruits of the earth were burnt up. See how every creature is that to us which God makes it to be, either comfortable or afflictive, serving us or incommoding us. Nothing among the inferior creatures is so necessary and beneficial to the world as the heat of the sun; it is that which puts life into the plants and renews the face of the earth at spring. And yet, if that go into an extreme, it undoes all again. Our Creator is our best friend; but, if we make him our enemy, we make the best friends we have among the creatures our enemies too. This drought God called for, and it came at the call; as the winds and the waves, so the rays of the sun, obey him. It was universal, and the ill effects of it were general; it was a drought upon the mountains, which, lying high, were first affected with it. The mountains were their pasture-grounds, and used to be covered over with flocks, but now there was no grass for them. It was upon the corn, the new wine, and the oil; all failed through the extremity of the hot weather, even all that the ground brought forth; it all withered. Nay, it had a bad influence upon men; the hot weather enfeebled some, and made them weary and faint, and spent their spirits; it inflamed others, and put them into fevers. It should seem, it brought diseases upon cattle too. In short, it spoiled all the labour of their hands, which they hoped to eat of and maintain their families by. Note, Meat for the belly is meat that perishes, and, if we labour for that only, we are in danger of losing our labour; but we are sure our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord if we labour for the meat which endures to eternal life. For the hand of the diligent, in the business of religion, will infallibly make rich, whereas, in the business of this life, the most solicitous and the most industrious often lose the labour of their hands. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* (2.) He that gives bread to the eater denied his blessing upon the bread they ate, and then that did not nourish them. The cause of the withering and failing of the corn in the field was visible—it was for want of rain; but, besides that, there was a secret blast and curse attending that which they brought home. [1.] When they had it in the barn

they were not sure of it: *I did blow upon it, saith the Lord of hosts* (v. 9), and that withered it, as buds are sometimes blasted in the spring by a nipping frost, which we see the effects of, but know not the way of. *I did blow it away*; so the margin reads it. When men have heaped wealth together God can scatter it with the breath of his mouth as easily as we can blow away a feather. Note, We can never be sure of any thing in this world; it is exposed, not only when it is in the field, but when it is housed; for there *moth and rust corrupt*, Matt. vi. 19. And, if we would have the comfort and continuance of our temporal enjoyments, we must make God our friend; for, if he bless them to us, they are blessings indeed, but if he blow upon them we can expect no good from them: *they make themselves wings and fly away*. [2.] When they had it upon the board it was not that to them that they expected: "*You eat, but you have not enough*, either because the meat is washy, and not satisfying, or because the stomach is greedy, and not satisfied. You eat, but you have no good digestion, and so are not nourished by it, nor does it answer the end, or you have not enough because you are not content, nor think it enough. You drink, but are not cooled and refreshed by it; you are not filled with drink; you are stinted, and have not enough to quench your thirst. The new wine is cut off from your mouth (Joel i. 5), nay, and you drink your water too by measure and with astonishment; you have no comfort of it, because you have no plenty of it, but are still in fear of falling short." [3.] That which they had upon their backs did them no good there: "*You clothe yourselves, but there is none warm*; your clothes soon wear out, and wax old, and grow thin, because God blows upon them," contrary to what Israel's did in the wilderness when God blessed them. It is God that makes our garments warm upon us, when he quiets the earth, Job xxxvii. 17. [4.] That which they had in their bags, which was not laid out, but laid up, they were not sure of: "*He that earns wages by hard labour, and has it paid him in ready current money, puts it into a bag with holes*; it drops through, and wastes away insensibly. Every thing is so scarce and dear that they spend their money as fast as they get it." Those that lay up their treasure on earth put it into a bag with holes; they lose it as they go along, and those that come after them pick it up. But, if we lay up our treasure in heaven, we provide for ourselves bags that wax not old, Luke xii. 33.

2. Observe wherefore God thus contended with them, and stopped the current of the favours promised them at their return (Joel ii. 24); they provoked him to do it: *It is because of my house that is waste*. This is the quarrel God has with them. The foundation of the temple is laid, but the building does not go on. "Every man runs to his



own house, to finish that, and to make that convenient and fine, and no care is taken about the Lord's house; and therefore it is that God crosses you thus in all your affairs, to testify his displeasure against you for that neglect, and to bring you to a sense of your sin and folly." Note, As those who seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof shall not only find them, but are most likely to have other things added to them, so those who neglect and postpone those things will not only lose them, but will justly have other things taken away from them. And if God cross us in our temporal affairs, and we meet with trouble and disappointment, we shall find this is the cause of it, the work we have to do for God and our own souls is left undone, and we seek our own things more than the things of Jesus Christ, Phil. ii. 21.

III. The reproof which the prophet gives them for their neglect of the temple-work (v. 4): "*Is it time for you, O you! to dwell in your ceiled houses, to have them beautified and adorned, and your families settled in them?*" They were not content with walls and roofs for necessity, but they must have for gaiety and fancy. "It is high time," says one, "that my house were wainscoted." "It is high time," says another, "that mine were painted." And God's house, all this time, *lies waste*, and nothing is done at it. "What!" says the prophet, "is it time that you should have your humour pleased, and not time you should have your God pleased?" How much was their disposition the reverse of David's, who could not be easy in his house of cedar while the ark of God was in curtains (2 Sam. vii. 2), and of Solomon's, who built the temple of God before he built a palace for himself. Note, Those are very much strangers to their own interest who prefer the conveniences and ornaments of the temporal life before the absolute necessities of the spiritual life, who are full of care to enrich their own houses, while God's temple in their hearts lies waste, and nothing is done for it or in it.

IV. The good counsel which the prophet gives to those who thus despised God, and whom God was therefore justly displeased with. 1. He would have them reflect: *Now therefore consider your ways*, v. 5 and again v. 7. "Be sensible of the hand of God gone out against you, and enquire into the reason; think what you have done that has provoked God thus to break in upon your comforts; and think what you will do to testify your repentance, that God may return in mercy to you." Note, It is the great concern of every one of us to consider our ways, to set our hearts to our ways (so the word is), to think on our ways (Ps. cxix. 59), to search and try them (Lam. iii. 40), to ponder the path of our feet (Prov. iv. 26), to apply our minds with all seriousness to the great and necessary duty of self-examination, and com-

muning with our own hearts concerning our spiritual state, our sins that are past, and our duty for the future; for sin is what we must answer for, duty is what we must do; about these therefore we must be inquisitive, rather than about events, which we must leave to God. Many are quick-sighted to pry into other people's ways who are very careless of their own; whereas our concern is to *prove every one his own work*, Gal. vi. 4. 2. He would have them reform (v. 8): "*Go up to the mountain, to Lebanon, and bring wood, and other materials that are wanting, and build the house with all speed; put it off no longer, but set to it in good earnest.*" Note, Our considering our ways must issue in the amending of whatever we find amiss in them. If any duty has been long neglected, that is not a reason why it should still be so, but why now at length it should be revived; better late than never. For their encouragement to apply in good earnest to this work, he assures them, (1.) That they should be accepted of him in it: *Build the house, and I will take pleasure in it*; and that was encouragement enough for them to apply to it with alacrity and resolution, and to go through with it, whatever it cost them. Note, Whatever God will take pleasure in, when it is done, we ought to take pleasure in the doing of, and to reckon that inducement enough to set about it, and go on with it in good earnest; for what greater satisfaction can we have in our own bosoms than in contributing any thing towards that which God will take pleasure in? It ought to be the top of our ambition to be *accepted of the Lord*, 2 Cor. v. 9. Though they had foolishly neglected the house of God, yet, if at length they will resume the care of it, God will not remember against them their former neglects, but will take pleasure in the work of their hands. Those who have long deferred their return to God, if at length they return with all their heart, must not despair of his favour. (2.) That he would be honoured by them in it: *I will be glorified, saith the Lord*. He will be served and worshipped in the temple when it is built, and sanctified in those that come nigh to him. It is worth while to bestow all possible care, and pains, and cost, upon that by which God may be glorified.

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. 13 Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with

you, saith the LORD. 14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, 15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

*As an ear-ring of gold* (says Solomon), and *an ornament of fine gold*, so amiable, so acceptable, in the sight of God and man, *is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear*, Prov. xxv. 12. The prophet here was a wise but faithful reprove, in God's name, and he met with an obedient ear. The foregoing sermon met with the desired success among the people, and their obedience met with due encouragement from God. Observe,

I. How the people returned to God in a way of duty. All those to whom that sermon was preached received the word in the love of it, and were wrought upon by it. Zerubabel, the chief governor, did not think himself above the check and command of God's word. He was a man that had been eminently useful in his day, and serviceable to the interest of the church, yet did not plead his former merits in answer to this reprove for his present remissness, but submitted to it. Joshua's business, as high priest, was to teach, and yet he was willing himself to be taught, and willingly received admonition and instruction. *The remnant of the people* (and the whole body of them was but a remnant, a very few of the many thousands of Israel) also were very pliable; they all *obeyed the voice of the Lord their God*, and bowed their neck to the yoke of his commands, and it is here recorded to their honour that they did so, v. 12. Their father said, *Sons, go work to-day in my vineyard*, in my temple; and they not only said, *We go, sir*, but they went immediately. 1. They looked upon the prophet to be the Lord's messenger, and the word he delivered to be the Lord's message to them; and therefore received it *not as the word of man, but as the word of Almighty God*; they obeyed his words, *as the Lord their God had sent him*, v. 12. Note, In attending to God's ministers we must have an eye to him that sent them, and receive them for his sake, while they act according to their commission. 2. They *did fear before the Lord*. Prophecy was a new thing with them; they had had no special messenger from heaven for a great while, and therefore now that they had one, and but one, they paid an extraordinary regard to him; whereas their fathers, who had many prophets, mocked and misused them. It is

sometimes so; when good preaching is most scarce it does most good, whereas the manna that is rained in plenty is loathed as *light bread*. And, because they so readily received this prophet, God, within a month or two after, raised them up another, Zech. i. 1. They *feared before the Lord*; they had a great regard to the divine authority and a great dread of the divine wrath, and were of those that *trembled at God's word*. The judgments of God which they had been under, though very severe, had not prevailed to make them fear before the Lord, until the word of God was sent to expound his providences, and then they feared; then, when they saw their own sin to be the cause of those judgments, then they feared. Note, A holy fear of God will have a great influence upon our obedience to him. *Serve the Lord with fear*; if we fear him not, we shall not serve him. 3. *The Lord stirred up their spirits*, v. 14. (1.) He excited them to their duty, and put it into their hearts to go about it. Note, Then the word of God has its success when God by his grace stirs up our spirits to comply with it; and without that grace we should remain stupid and utterly averse to every thing that is good. It is in the day of a divine power that we are made willing. (2.) He encouraged them in their duty, and with those encouragements enlarged their hearts, Ps. cxix. 32. When they heard the word they feared; but, lest they should sink under the weight of that fear, God stirred them up, and made them cheerful and bold to encounter the difficulties they might meet with. Note, When God has work to do, he will either find or make men fit to do it, and stir them up to it. 4. They applied to their work with all possible vigour: *They came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts their God*. Every one, according as his capacity or ability was, lent a hand, some way or other, to further that good work; and this they did with an eye to God as the *Lord of hosts*, and as their God, the God of Israel. The consideration of God's sovereign dominion in the world by his providence, and his covenant-relation to his people by his grace, should stir up our spirits to act for him, and for the advancement of the interest of his kingdom among men, to the utmost of our power. 5. They did this speedily; it was but on the first day of the sixth month that Haggai preached them this sermon, and by the twenty-fourth of the same month, little more than three weeks after, they were all busy working in the house of the Lord their God, v. 15. To show that they were ashamed of their delays hitherto, now that they were convinced and called they were resolved to delay no longer, but to strike while the iron was hot, and to set about the work while they were under convictions. Note, Those that have lost time have need to redeem time; and the longer we have loitered in that which is good



the more haste we should make when we are convinced of our folly.

II. How God met them in a way of mercy. The same prophet that brought them the reproof brought them a very comforting encouraging word (v. 13): *Then spoke Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message, in his name, and as from him, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.* That is all he has to say, and that is enough; as that word of Christ to his disciples is (Matt. xxviii. 20), "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*" *I am with you*, that is, I will forgive your neglects hitherto, and they shall not be remembered against you; I will remove the judgments you have been under for those neglects, and will appear for you, as I have in them appeared against you. *I am with you* to protect you against your enemies that bear ill-will to your work, and to prosper you, and to give you success in it—with you to strengthen your hands, and bless the work of them, without which blessing those labour in vain that build." Note, Those that work for God have God with them; and, if he be for us, who can be against us? If he be with us, what difficulty can stand before us?

#### CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have three sermons preached by the prophet Haggai for the encouragement of those that are forward to build the temple. In the first he assures the builders that the glory of the house they were now building should, in spiritual respects, though not in outward, exceed that of Solomon's temple, in which he has an eye to the coming of Christ, ver. 1—9. In the second he assures them that though their sin, in delaying to build the temple, had retarded the prosperous progress of all their other affairs, yet now that they had set about it in good earnest he would bless them, and give them success, ver. 10—19. In the third he assures Zerubbabel that, as a reward of his pious zeal and activity herein, he should be a favourite of Heaven, and one of the ancestors of Messiah the Prince, whose kingdom should be set up on the ruins of all opposing powers, ver. 20—23.

**I**N the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, 2 Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, 3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? 4 Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for *I am* with you, saith the LORD of hosts: 5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. 6 For thus saith the LORD of

hosts; Yet once, it *is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

Here is, I. The date of this message, v. 1. It was sent on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, when the builders had been about a month at work (since the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month), and had got it in some forwardness. Note, Those that are hearty in the service of God shall receive fresh encouragements from him to proceed in it, as their case calls for them. Set the wheels a going, and God will oil them.

II. The direction of this message, v. 2. The encouragements here are sent to the same persons to whom the reproofs in the foregoing chapter are directed; for those that are wounded by the convictions of the word shall be healed and bound up by its consolations. *Speak to Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and the residue of the people*, the very same that *obeyed the voice of the Lord* (ch. i. 12) and whose spirits God stirred up to do so (ch. i. 14); to them are sent these words of comfort.

III. The message itself, in which observe,

1. The discouragements which those laboured under who were employed in this work. That which was such a damp upon them, and an alloy to their joy, when the foundation of the temple was laid, was still a clog upon them—that they could not build such a temple now as Solomon built, not so large, so stately, so sumptuous, a one as that was. This fetched tears from the eyes of many, when the dimensions of it were first laid (Ezra iii. 12), and still it made the work go on heavily—that the glory of this house, *in comparison* with that of the former, was *as nothing*, v. 3. It was now about seventy years since Solomon's temple was destroyed (for that was in the nineteenth year of the captivity, and this about the nineteenth after the captivity), so that there might be some yet alive who could remember to have seen it, and still they would be upbraiding themselves and their brethren with the great disparity between this house and that. One could remember the gold with which it was overlaid, another the precious stones with which it was garnished; one could describe the magnificence of the porch, another of the pillars—and where are these now? This weakened the hands of the builders; for, though our gracious God is pleased with us



if we do in sincerity as well as we can in his service, yet our proud hearts will scarcely let us be pleased with ourselves unless we do as well as others whose abilities far exceed ours. And it is sometimes the fault of old people to discourage the services of the present age by crying up too much the performances and attainments of the former age, with which others should be provoked to emulation, but not exposed to contempt. *Say not thou that the former days were better than these* (Eccl. vii. 10), but thank God that there is any good in these, bad as they are.

2. The encouragement that is given them to go on in the work, notwithstanding (v. 4): *Yet now*, though this house is likely to be much inferior to the former, *be strong, O Zerubbabel! and be strong, O Joshua!* Let not these leading men give way to this suggestion, nor be disheartened by it, but do as well as they can, when they cannot do so well as they would; and let all the people of the land *be strong too, and work*; and, if the leaders have but a good heart on it, it is hoped that the followers will have the better heart. Note, Those that work for God ought to exert themselves with vigour, and then to encourage themselves with hope that it will end well.

3. The grounds of these encouragements. God himself says to them, *Fear you not* (v. 5), and he gives good reasons for it.

(1.) They have God with them, his Spirit and his special presence: *Be strong, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts, v. 4.* This he had said before (ch. i. 13), *I am with you.* But we need to have these assurances repeated, that we may have strong consolation. The presence of God with us, as the *Lord of hosts*, is enough to silence all our fears and to help us over all the discouragements we may meet with in the way of our duty. The Jews had hosts against them, but they had the Lord of hosts with them, to take their part and plead their cause. He is with them; for, [1.] He adheres to his promise. His covenant is inviolable, and he will be always theirs, and will appear and act for them, *according to the word that he covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt.* Though he chastens them for their transgressions with the rod, yet he will not make his faithfulness to fail. [2.] He dwells among them by his Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy. When he first formed them into a people he gave his good Spirit to instruct them (Neh. ix. 20); and still the Spirit, though often grieved and provoked to withdraw, remained among them. It was the Spirit of God that stirred up their spirits to come out of Babylon (Ezra i. 5), and now to build the temple, Hag. i. 14. Note, We have reason to be encouraged as long as we have the Spirit of God remaining among us to work upon us, for so long we have God with us to work for us.

(2.) They shall have the Messiah among

them shortly—*him that should come.* To him bore all the prophets witness and this prophet particularly here, v. 6, 7. Here is an intimation of the time of his coming, that it should not be long ere he came: "*Yet once, it is a little while*, and he shall come. The Old-Testament church has but one stage more (if we may say so) to travel; five stages were now past, from Adam to Noah, thence to Abraham, thence to Moses, thence to Solomon's temple, thence to the captivity, and now yet one stage more, its sixth day's journey, and then comes the sabbatism of the Messiah's kingdom. Let the Son of man, when he comes, find faith on the earth, and let the children of promise continue still looking for him, for now it is but a little while and he will come; hold out, faith and patience, yet awhile, for he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." And, as he then said of his first appearance, so now of his second, *Surely I come quickly.* Now concerning his coming it is here foretold, [1.] That it shall be introduced by a general shaking (v. 6): *I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land.* This is applied to the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the world, to make way for which he will judge among the heathen, Ps. cx. 6. God will once again do for his church as he did when he brought them out of Egypt; he shook the heavens and earth at Mount Sinai, with thunder, and lightnings, and earthquakes; he shook the sea and the dry land when lanes were made through the sea and streams fetched out of the rock. This shall be done again, when, at the sufferings of Christ, the sun shall be darkened, the earth shake, the rocks rend—when, at the birth of Christ, Herod and all Jerusalem are troubled (Matt. ii. 3), and he is set for the full and rising again of many. When his kingdom was set up it was with a shock to the nations; the oracles were silenced, idols were destroyed, and the powers of the kingdoms were moved and removed, Heb. xii. 27. It denotes the removing of the things that are shaken. Note, The shaking of the nations is often in order to the settling of the church and the establishing of the things that cannot be shaken. [2.] That it shall issue in a general satisfaction. He shall come as the desire of all nations—desirable to all nations, for in him shall all the families of the earth be blessed with the best of blessings—long expected and desired by the good people in all nations, that had any intelligence from the Old-Testament predictions concerning him. Balaam in the land of Moab had spoken of a star that should arise out of Jacob, and Job in the land of Uz of his living Redeemer; the concourse of devout men from all parts at Jerusalem (Acts ii. 5) was in expectation of the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom about that time. All the nations that are brought in to Christ, and disciplined in his name, have called him, and will call him,



all their salvation and all their desire. This glorious title of Christ seems to refer to Jacob's prophecy (Gen. xlix. 10), that to him shall the gathering of the people be.

(3.) The house they are now building shall be filled with glory to such a degree that its glory shall exceed that of Solomon's temple. The enemies of the Jews followed them with reproach, and cast contempt upon the house they were building; but they might very well endure that when God undertook to fill it with glory. It is God's prerogative to fill with glory; the glory that comes from him is satisfying, and not vain glory. Moses's tabernacle and Solomon's temple were filled with glory when God in a cloud took possession of them; but this house shall be filled with glory of another nature. [1.] Let them not be concerned because this house will not have so much silver and gold about it as Solomon's temple had, v. 8. God needs not the silver and gold to adorn his temple, for (says he), *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine*. All the silver and gold in the world are his; all that is hid in the bowels of the earth (for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof), all that is laid up in the exchequers, banks, and treasuries of the children of men, and all that circulates for the maintaining of trade and commerce; it is all the Lord's. Every penny bears his image as well as Cæsar's; and therefore when gold and silver are dedicated to his honour, and employed in his service, no addition is made to him, for it was his before. When David and his princes offered vast sums for the service of the house of God, they acknowledged, *It is all thy own, and of thy own, Lord, have we given thee*, 1 Chron. xxix. 14, 16. Therefore God needs not sacrifice, for *every beast of the forest is his*, Ps. l. 10. Note, If we have silver and gold, we must serve and honour God with them, for they are all his own, we have but the use of them, the property remains in him; but, if we have not silver and gold to honour him with, we must honour him with such as we have, and he will accept us, for he needs them not; all the silver and gold in the world are his already. *The earth is full of his riches, so is the great and wide sea also*. [2.] Let them be comforted with this, that, though this temple have less gold in it, it shall have more glory than Solomon's (v. 9): *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*. This was never true in respect of outward glory. This latter house was indeed in its latter times very much beautified and enriched by Herod, and we find the disciples admiring the stones and buildings of the temple, how fine they were (Mark xiii. 1); but it was nothing in comparison with Solomon's temple; and, besides, the Jews own that several of the divine glories of the first temple were wanting in this—the ark, the *urim* and *thummim*, the fire from heaven, and the *Schechinah*; so that we cannot conceive how the glory of this

latter house should in any thing exceed that of the former, but in that which would indeed excel all the glories of the first house—the presence of the Messiah in it, the Son of God, his being presented there the glory of his people Israel, his attending there at twelve years old, and afterwards his preaching and working miracles there, and his driving the buyers and sellers out of it. It was necessary, then, that the Messiah should come while the second temple stood; but, that being long since destroyed, we must conclude that our Lord Jesus is the Christ, is he that should come, and we are to look for no other. It was also the glory of this latter house, First, That, before the coming of Christ, it was always kept free from idols and idolatries, and was never polluted with those abominable things, as the first temple often was (2 Kings xxiii. 11, 12), and in this its glory excelled all the glory of that. Note, The purity of the church, and the strict adherence to divine institutions, are much more its glory than external pomp and splendour. Secondly, That, after Christ, the gospel was preached in it by the apostles, even all the words of this life, Acts v. 20. In the temple Jesus Christ was daily preached, Acts v. 42. Now the ministration of righteousness and life by the gospel was unspeakably more glorious than the law, which was a ministration of death and condemnation, 2 Cor. iii. 9, 10. Note, That is the most valuable glory which arises from our relation to Christ and our interest in him. As, where Christ is, behold a greater than Solomon is there, so the heart in which he dwells, and makes a living temple, behold it is more glorious than Solomon's temple, and will be so to eternity.

(4.) They should see a comfortable end of their present troubles, and enjoy the pleasure of a happy settlement: *In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts*. Note, God's presence with his people in his ordinances secures to them all good. If God be with us, peace is with us. But the Jews under the latter temple had so much trouble that we must conclude this promise to have its accomplishment in that spiritual peace which Jesus Christ has by his blood purchased for, and by his last will and testament bequeathed to, all believers (John xiv. 27), that peace which Christ himself preached as the prophet of peace, and gives as the prince of peace. God will give peace in this place; he will give his Son to be the peace, Eph. ii. 14.

10 In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, 11 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, 12 If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or

wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. 13 Then said Haggai, *If one that is unclean* by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. 14 Then answered Haggai, and said, *So is this people, and so is this nation* before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there *is unclean*. 15 And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: 16 Since those *days* were, when *one* came to a heap of twenty *measures*, there were *but* ten: when *one* came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty *vessels* out of the press, there were *but* twenty. 17 I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye *turned* not to me, saith the LORD. 18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth *month*, *even* from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider *it*. 19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless *you*.

This sermon was preached two months after that in the former part of the chapter. The priests and Levites preached constantly, but the prophets preached occasionally; both were good and needful. We have need to be taught our duty *in season and out of season*. The people were now going on vigorously with the building of the temple, and in hopes shortly to have it ready for their use and to be employed in the services of it; and now God sends them a message by his prophet, which would be of use to them,

I. By way of conviction and caution. They were now engaged in a very good work, but they were concerned to see to it, not only that it was good for the matter of it, but that it was done in a right manner, for otherwise it would not be accepted of God. God sees there are many among them that spoil this good work, by going about it with unsanctified hearts and hands, and are likely to gain no advantage to themselves by it; these are here convicted, and all are warned thereby to purify the hands they employ in this work, *for to the pure only all things are pure, and*

from the pure only that comes which is pure. This matter is here illustrated by the established rules of the ceremonial law, in putting *a difference between the clean and the unclean*, about which many of the appointments of the law were conversant. Hereby it appears that a spiritual use is to be made of the ceremonial law, and that it was intended, not only as a divine ritual to the Jews, but for *instruction in righteousness* to all, even to us upon whom the ends of the world have come, to discover to us both sin and Christ, both our disease and our remedy. Now observe here,

1. What the rule of the law was. The prophet is ordered to enquire of the priests concerning it (v. 11); for their *lips* should keep this *knowledge*, and the people should *enquire the law at their mouth*, Mal. ii. 7. Haggai himself, though a prophet, must *ask the priests concerning the law*. His business, as an extraordinary messenger, was to expound the providences of God, and to give directions concerning particular duties, as he had done, ch. i. 8, 9. But he would not take the priests' work out of the hands of those who were the ordinary ministers, and whose business it was to expound the ordinances of God, to teach the people the meaning of them, and to give the general rules for the observance of them. In a case of that nature, Haggai must himself consult them. Note, God has given to his ministers diversities of gifts, and calls them out to do diversities of services, so that they have need one of another, should make use one of another, and be helpful one to another. The prophet, though divinely inspired, cannot say to the priest, *I have no need of thee*, nor can the priest say so to the prophet. Perhaps Haggai was *therefore* ordered to consult the priests, that out of their own mouths he might judge both them and the people committed to their charge, and convict them of worse than ceremonial pollution. See Lev. x. 10, 11. Now the rules of the law, in the cases propounded, are, (1.) That he that has holy flesh in his clothes cannot by the touch of his clothes communicate holiness (v. 12): *If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment*, though the garment is thereby so far made a devoted thing as that it is not to be put to common use till it has first been washed in the holy place (Lev. vi. 27), yet it shall by no means transmit a holiness to either meat or drink, so as to make it ever the better to those that use it. (2.) That he that is ceremonially unclean by the touch of a dead body does by his touch communicate that uncleanness. The law is express (Num. xix. 22), *Whatsoever the unclean person touches shall be unclean*; yet this Haggai will have from the priests' own mouth, for concerning those things that we find very plain in our Bibles yet it is good to have the advice of our ministers. The sum of these two rules is that pollution is more easily communicated than sanctifica-



tion; that is (says Grotius), There are many ways of vice, but only one of virtue, and that a difficult one. *Bonum oritur ex integris; malum ex quolibet defectu*—Good implies perfection; evil commences with the slightest defect. Let not men think that living among good people will recommend them to God if they are not good themselves, but let them fear that touching the unclean thing will defile them, and therefore let them keep at a distance from it.

2. How it is here applied (v. 14): *So is this people, and so is this nation, before me.* He does not call them his people and his nation (they are unworthy to be owned by him), but *this people*, and *this nation*. They have been thus before God; they thought their offering sacrifices on the altar would sanctify them, and excuse their neglect to build the temple, and remove the curse which by that neglect they had brought upon their common enjoyments: "No," says God, "your holy flesh and your altar will be so far from sanctifying your meat and drink, your wine and oil, to you, that your contempt of God's temple will bring a pollution, not only on your common enjoyments, but even on your sacrifices too; so that while you continued in that neglect all was unclean to you, nay, and so is *this people* still; and so they will be; on these terms they will still stand with me, and on no other—that if they be profane, and sensual, and morally impure, if they have wicked hearts, and live wicked lives, though they work ever so hard at the temple while it is building, and though they offer ever so many and costly sacrifices there when it is built, yet that shall not serve to sanctify their meat and drink to them, and to give them a comfortable use of them; nay, the impurity of their hearts and lives shall make even that work of their hands, and all their offerings, unclean, and an abomination to God." And the case is the same with us. Those whose devotions are plausible, but whose conversation is wicked, will find their devotions unable to sanctify their enjoyments, but their wickedness prevailing to pollute them. Note, When we are employed in any good work we should be jealous over ourselves, lest we render it unclean by our corruptions and mismanagements.

II. By way of comfort and encouragement. If their hearts be right with God, and their eye single in his service, they shall have the benefit of their devotion. God will take away the judgment of famine wherewith they have been corrected for their remissness, and will restore them great plenty. This they are called to consider, and to observe whether God would not be to the utmost as good as his word, and by his providence remarkably countenance and recompense their reformation in this matter. To make this the more signal, let them set down the day when they began to work at the building of the temple, to raise the structure

upon the foundations that had been laid some time before. On the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month they began to prepare materials (ch. i. 15), and now on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month they began to *lay a stone upon a stone in the temple of the Lord*; let them take notice of this day, and observe, 1. How they had gone behind-hand in their estates before this day. Let them remember the time when there was a sensible waste and decay in all they had, v. 16. A man went to his garner, expecting to find a heap of twenty measures of corn, so much he used to have from such a piece of ground, or so much used to be left at that time of the year, or so much he took it for granted there was when he fetched the last from it, but he found it unaccountably diminished, and, when he came to measure it, *there were but ten measures*; it had run in and dried away in the keeping, or vermin had eaten it, or it was stolen. In like manner he went to the wine-press, expecting to draw fifty vessels of wine, for so much he used to have from such a quantity of grapes, but they did not yield as usual, for he could get *but twenty*. This agrees with what we had, ch. i. 9, *You looked for much, and it came to little*. Note, It is our folly that we are apt to raise our expectation from the creature, and to think tomorrow must needs be as this day and much more abundant, but we are commonly disappointed, and the more we expect the more grievous the disappointment is. In the stores and treasures of the new covenant we need not fear being disappointed when we come by faith to draw from them. But this was not all. God did visibly contend with them in the weather (v. 17): *I smote you with blastings*, winds and frosts, which made every green thing to wither, and *with mildew*, which choked the corn when it was knitting, and *with hail*, which battered it down and broke it when it had grown to some maturity; thus they were disappointed in all the labour of their hands, while they neglected to lay their hand to the work of God and to labour in that. Note, While we take no care of God's interest we cannot expect he should take care of ours. And, when he thus walks contrary to us, he expects that we should return to him and to our duty. But this people either saw not the hand of God in it (imputing it to chance) or saw not their own sin as the provoking cause of it, and therefore turned not to him. They were a long time incorrigible and unhumbled under these rebukes, so that God's hand was *stretched out still*, for the people turned not to him that smote them, Isa. ix. 12, 13. They might easily observe that as long as they continued in neglect of the temple work all their affairs went backward. But, 2. Let them now observe, and they should find that from this day forward God would bless them (v. 18, 19): "Consider now whether when you begin to change your way towards God



you do not find God changing his way towards you; from *this day*, when you fall to work about the temple, *consider it*, I say, and you shall find a remarkable turn given for the better to all your affairs. *Is the seed yet in the barn?* Yes it is, and not yet thrown into the ground. The fruit-trees do not as yet bud, *the vine, and the fig-tree, and the olive-tree*, have not as yet brought forth, so that nothing appears to promise a good harvest or vintage next year. Nature does not promise it; but, now that you begin to apply in good earnest to your duty, the God of nature promises it; he has said, *From this day I will bless you*. It is the best day's work you ever did in your lives, for hence you may date the return of your prosperity." He does not say what they shall be, but, in general, *I will bless you*; and those that know what are the fruits flowing from God's blessing know they can desire no more to make them happy. "*I will bless you*, and then you shall soon recover all your losses, shall thrive as fast as before you went backward; for the blessing of the Lord, that maketh rich, and those whom he blesses are blessed indeed." Note, When we begin to make conscience of our duty to God we may expect his blessing; and this tree of life is so known by its fruits that one may discern almost to a day a remarkable turn of Providence in favour of those that return in a way of duty; so that they and others may say that *from this day they are blessed*. See Mal. iii. 10. And whoso is wise will observe these things, and understand by them the lovingkindness of the Lord.

20 And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, 21 Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; 22 And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. 23 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

After Haggai's sermon *ad populum*—to the people, here follows one, the same day, *ad magistratum*—to the magistrates, a word directed particularly to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, who was a leading active man

in this good work which the people now set about, and therefore he shall have some particular marks put upon him (v. 21): *Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah*, speak to him by himself. He has thoughts in his head far above those of the common people, as wise princes are wont to have, who move in a higher and larger sphere than others. The people of the land are in care about their corn-fields and vineyards; God has assured them that they shall prosper, and we hope that will make them easy; but Zerubbabel is concerned about the community and its interests, about the neighbouring nations, and the revolutions of their governments, and what will become of the few and feeble Jews in those changes and convulsions, and how such a poor prince as he is should be able to keep his ground and serve his country. "Go to him," says God, "and tell him it shall be well with him and his remnant, and let that make him easy."

I. Let him expect to hear of great commotions in the nations of the earth, and let them not be a surprise to him; behold, he is told of them before (v. 21, 22): *I will shake the heavens and the earth*. 'Tis he had said before (v. 6, 7), and now says it again to Zerubbabel; let him expect shaking times, universal concussions. The world is like the sea, like the wheel, always in motion, but sometimes in a special manner turbulent. But, blessed be God, if the earth be shaken, it is to *shake the wicked out of it*, Job xxxviii.

13. In the apocalyptic visions earthquakes hode no ill to the church. Here the heavens and the earth are shaken, that proud oppressors may be broken and brought down: *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms*. The Chaldean monarchy, which had been the throne of kingdoms a great while, was already overthrown; and the powers that are, and are yet to come, shall in like manner be overthrown; their day will come to fall. 1. Though they be ever so powerful, yet the strength of their kingdoms shall be destroyed. They trust in chariots and horses (Ps. xx. 7), but their chariots shall be overthrown, and those that ride in them, so that they shall not be able to attack the people of God, whom they persecute, nor to escape the judgments of God, which persecute them. 2. Though there appear none likely to be the instruments of their destruction, yet God will bring it about, for they shall be brought down every one by the sword of his brother. This reads the doom of all the enemies of God's church, that will not repent to give him glory; it seems likewise designed as a promise of Christ's victory over the powers of darkness, his overthrow of Satan's throne, that throne of kingdoms, the throne of the god of this world, the taking from him all the armour wherein he trusted and dividing the spoil. And all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be put down, that the kingdom may be delivered up to God, even the Father



II. Let him depend upon it that he shall be safe under the divine protection in the midst of all these commotions, v. 23. Zerubbabel was active to build God a house, and therefore God makes the same promise to him as he did to David on the like occasion—that he would *build him a house*, and establish it, even *in that day* when heaven and earth are shaken. This promise refers to this good man himself and to his family. He honoured God, and God would honour him. His successors likewise in the government of Judah might take encouragement from it; though their authority was very precarious as to men, yet God would confirm it, and this would contribute to the stability of the people over whom God had set them. But this promise has special reference to Christ, who lineally descended from Zerubbabel, and is the sole builder of the gospel-temple. 1. Zerubbabel is here owned as *God's servant*, and it is an honourable mention that is hereby made of him, as Moses and David *my servants*. When God destroys his enemies he will prefer his servants. Our Lord Jesus is his Father's servant in the work of redemption, but faithful as a Son, Isa. xlii. 1. 2. He is owned as God's elect: *I have chosen thee*

to this office; and whom God makes choice of he will make use of. Our Lord Jesus is chosen of God, 1 Pet. ii. 4. And he is the head of the chosen remnant; in him they are chosen. 3. It is promised that, being chosen, God will make him as a *signet*. Jeconiah had been as the *signet on God's right hand*, but was *plucked thence* (Jer. xxii. 24); and now Zerubbabel is substituted in the room of him. He shall be near and dear to God, precious in his sight, and honourable, and his family shall continue till the Messiah spring out of it, who is *the signet on God's right hand*. This intimates, (1.) The delight the Father has in him. In him he once and again declared himself to be *well pleased*. He is set as a *seal upon his heart, a seal upon his arm*, is brought near unto him (Dan. vii. 13), is *hidden in the shadow of his hand*, Isa. xlix. 2. (2.) The dominion the Father has entrusted him with. Princes sign their edicts, grants, and commissions, with their signet-rings, Esth. iii. 10. Our Lord Jesus is the signet on God's right hand, for all power is given to him and derived from him. By him the great charter of the gospel is signed and ratified, and it is in him that all the promises of God are yea and amen.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE PROPHECY OF

## ZECHARIAH.

THIS prophet was colleague with the prophet Haggai, and a worker together with him in forwarding the building of the second temple (Ezra v. 1); for two are better than one. Christ sent forth his disciples two and two. Zechariah began to prophesy some time after Haggai. But he continued longer, soared higher in visions and revelations, wrote more, and prophesied more particularly concerning Christ, than Haggai had done; so *the last shall be first*: the last in time sometimes proves first in dignity. He begins with a plain practical sermon, expressive of that which was the scope of his prophesying, in the first five verses; but afterwards, to the end of ch. vi., he relates the visions he saw, and the instructions he received immediately from heaven by them. At ch. vii., from an enquiry made by the Jews concerning fasting, he takes occasion to show them the duty of their present day, and to encourage them to hope for God's favour, to the end of ch. viii., after which there are two sermons, which are both called *burdens of the word of the Lord* (one begins with ch. ix., the other with ch. xii.), which probably were preached some time after; the scope of them is to reprove for sin, and threaten God's judgments against the impenitent, and to encourage those that feared God with assurances of the mercy God had in store for his church, and especially of the coming of the Messiah and the setting up of his kingdom in the world.

## CHAP. I.

In this chapter, after the introduction (ver. 1), we have, I. An awakening call to a sinful people to repent of their sins and return to God, ver. 2—6. II. Great encouragement given to hope for mercy. 1. By the vision of the horses, ver. 7—11. 2. By the prayer of the angel for Jerusalem, and the answer to that prayer, ver. 12—17.

3. By the vision of the four carpenters that were employed to cut off the four horns with which Judah and Jerusalem were scattered, ver. 18—21.

**I**N the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of

the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 2 The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. 3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. 4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD. 5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? 6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

Here is, I. The foundation of Zechariah's ministry; it is laid in a divine authority: *The word of the Lord came to him.* He received a divine commission to be God's mouth to the people and with it instructions what to say. He received of the Lord that which also he delivered unto them. *The word of the Lord was to him;* it came in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, as a real thing, and not a fancy. For the ascertaining of this, we have here, 1. The time when the word of the Lord came first to him, or when the word that next follows came to him: it was in the second year of Darius. Before the captivity the prophets dated their writings by the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel; but now by the reigns of the kings of Persia, to whom they were subjects. Such a melancholy change had sin made of their circumstances. Zerubbabel took not so much state upon him as to have public acts dated by the years of his government, and in things of this nature the prophets, as is fit, complied with the usage of the time, and scrupled not to reckon by the years of the heathen kings, as Dan. vii. 1; viii. 1. Zechariah preached his first sermon in the eighth month of this second year of Darius; Haggai preached his in the sixth month of the same year, Hag. i. 1. The people being readily obedient to the word of the Lord in the mouth of Haggai, God blessed them with another prophet; for to him that has, and uses well what he has, more shall be given. 2. The name and family of the prophet to whom the word of the Lord came: He was Zechariah,

the son of Baruchiah, the son of Iddo, and he was the prophet, as Haggai is called the prophet, Hag. i. 1. For, though in former ages there was one Iddo a prophet (2 Chron. xii. 15), yet we have no reason to think that Zechariah was of his progeny, or should be denominated from him. The learned Mr. Pemble is decidedly of opinion that this Zechariah, the son of Baruchiah, is the same that our Saviour says was slain between the temple and the altar, perhaps many years after the rebuilding of the temple (Matt. xxiii. 35), and that our Saviour does not mean (as is commonly thought) Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, for why should Jehoiada be called Baruchiah? And he thinks the manner of Christ's account persuades us to think so; for, reckoning up the innocent blood shed by the Jews, he begins at Abel, and ends even in the last of the holy prophets. Whereas, after Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, many prophets and righteous men were put to death by them. It is true there is no mention made in any history of their slaying this Zechariah, but Josephus might industriously conceal that shame of his nation. Perhaps what Zechariah spoke in his prophesying concerning Christ of his being sold, his being wounded in the house of his friends, and the shepherd being smitten, was verified in the prophet himself, and so he became a type of Christ. Probably, being assaulted by his persecutors, he took sanctuary in the court of the priests (and some think he was himself a priest), and so was slain between the porch and the altar.

II. The first-fruits of Zechariah's ministry. Before he came to visions and revelations, and delivered his prophetic discourses, he preached that which was plain and practical; for it is best to begin with that. Before he published the promises of mercy, he published calls to repentance, for thus the way of the Lord must be prepared. Law must be first preached, and then gospel. Now,

1. The prophet here puts them in mind of the controversy God had had with their fathers (v. 2): "The Lord has been sorely displeased with your fathers, and has laid them under the tokens of his displeasure. You have heard with your ears, and your fathers have told you of it; you have seen with your eyes the woeful remains of it. God's quarrel with you has been of long standing, and therefore it is time for you to think of taking it up." Note, The judgments of God, which those that went before us were under, should be taken as warnings to us not to tread in their steps, and calls to repentance, that we may cut off the entail of the curse and get it turned into a blessing.

2. He calls them, in God's name, to return to him, and make their peace with him, v. 3. God by him says that to this backsliding people which he had often said by his servants the prophets: "Turn you to me in a way of faith and repentance, duty and obe-



dience, and I will turn to you in a way of favour and mercy, peace and reconciliation." Let the rebels return to their allegiance, and they shall be taken under the protection of the government and enjoy all the privileges of good subjects. Let them change their way, and God will change his. See Mal. iii. 7. But that which is most observable here is that God is called here, the *Lord of hosts* three times: *Thus saith the Lord of hosts*. It is he that speaks, and therefore you are bound to regard what he says." *Turn you to me, saith the Lord of hosts* (this intimates the authority and obligation of the command), *and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of hosts*—this intimates the validity and value of the promise; so that it is no vain repetition. Note, The consideration of God's almighty power and sovereign dominion should both engage and encourage sinners to repent and turn to him. It is very desirable to have the Lord of hosts our friend and very dreadful to have him our enemy.

3. He warns them not to persist in their impenitence, as their fathers had done (v. 4): *Be you not as your fathers*. Instead of being hardened in their evil courses by the example of their fathers' sins, let them rather be deterred from them by the example of their fathers' punishment. We are apt to be governed very much by precedent, and we are well or ill governed according to the use we make of the precedents before us. The same examples to some are a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death. Some argued, "Shall we be wiser than our fathers? They never minded the prophets, and why then should we mind them? They made laws against them, and why should we tolerate them?" But they are here taught how they should argue: "Our fathers slighted the prophets, and God was sorely displeased with them for it; therefore let us the more carefully regard what God says to us by his prophets." "Review what is past, and observe."

(1.) "What was the message that God sent by his servants the prophets to your fathers: *The former prophets cried to your fathers*, cried aloud, and did not spare, not spare themselves, not spare your fathers; they cried as men in earnest, as men that would be heard; they spoke not as from themselves, but in the name of the *Lord of hosts*; and this was the substance of what they said, the burden of every song, the application of every sermon—*Turn you now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings*; the very same that we now preach to you. Be persuaded to leave your sins; resolve to have no more to do with them. A speedy reformation is the only way to prevent an approaching ruin: *Turn you now from sin to God without delay*."

(2.) "How little this message was regarded by your fathers: *But they did not hear*, they did not heed. They turned a deaf ear to

these calls: *They would not hearken unto me, saith the Lord*. They would not be reclaimed, would not be ruled, by the word I sent them; say not then that you will do as your fathers did, for they did amiss;" see Jer. xlv. 17. Note, We must not follow the examples of our dear fathers unless they were God's dear children, nor any further than they were dutiful and obedient to him.

(3.) "What has become both of your fathers and of the prophets that preached to them? They are all dead and gone," v. 5. [1.] *Your fathers, where are they?* The whole generation of them is swept away, and their place knows them no more. Note, When we think of our ancestors, that have gone through the world and gone out of it before us, we should think, *Where are they?* Here they were, in the towns and countries where we live, passing and repassing in the same streets, dwelling in the same houses, trading in the same shops and exchanges, worshipping God in the same churches. But where are they? They are somewhere still; when they died there was not an end of them. They are in eternity, in the world of spirits, the unchangeable world, to which we are hastening apace. Where are they? Those of them that lived and died in sin are in torment, and we are warned by Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, to look to it that we *come not to that place of torment*, Luke xvi. 28, 29. Those of them that lived and died in Christ are in paradise; and, if we live and die as they did, we shall be with them shortly, with them eternally. [2.] *The prophets also, did they live for ever?* No, they are gone too. The treasure is put into earthen vessels, the water of life into earthen pitchers, often cracked, and brought home broken at last. Christ is a prophet that lives for ever, but all other prophets have a period put to their office. Note, Ministers are dying men, and live not for ever in this world. They are to look upon themselves as such, and to preach accordingly, as those that must be silenced shortly, and know not which sermon may be the last. People are to look upon them as such, and to hear accordingly, as those that yet a little while have the *light with them*, that they may walk and work *while they have the light*. Oh that this weighty consideration had its due weight given it, that we are dying ministers dealing with dying people about the concerns of immortal souls and an awful eternity, which both they and we are standing upon the brink of! It concerns us to think of the prophets that are gone, that were *before us of old*, Jer. xxviii. 8. Those that were the glory of men withered and fell; but the *word of the Lord endures for ever*, 1 Pet. i. 24, 25. The prophets that are now, *do we live for ever?* (so some read it); no, Haggai and Zechariah will not be long with you, and prophecy itself shall shortly cease. In another world

both we and our prophets shall live for ever; and to prepare for that world ought to be our great care and business in this.

(4.) "What were the effects of the word which God spoke to them by his prophets, v. 6. The preachers died, and the hearers died, but the word of God died not; that took effect, and not one iota or tittle of it fell to the ground." As the rain and snow from heaven, *it shall not return void*, Isa. lv. 11. He appealed to themselves; they knew very well, [1.] That the judgments God had threatened were executed upon their fathers, and they were made to feel what they would not believe and fear: "*My statutes which I commanded my servants the prophets*, the precepts with the penalties annexed, which I charged them with the delivery of, *did they not take hold of your fathers?*" Though God's prophets could not fasten convictions upon them, the calamities threatened overtook them, and they could not escape them, nor get out of the reach of them. God's words took hold of them as the bailiff arrests the debtor, and takes him in execution for contempt. Note, The unbelief of man cannot make the threatenings of God's word of no effect, but, sooner or later, they will take place, if the prescribed course be not taken to prevent the execution of them. God's anger will certainly take hold of those that will not be taken hold of by his authority; for when he judges he will overcome. [2.] That they themselves could not but own the accomplishment of the word of God in the judgments of God that were upon them, and that therein he was righteous, and had done them no wrong: *They returned, and said* (they changed their mind, and when it was too late to prevent the ruin of their nation they acknowledged), *Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us according to our ways and doings, to reckon with us for them, so has he dealt with us*, and we must acknowledge both his truth and his justice, must blame ourselves only, and have no blame to lay to him. *Sero sapiunt Phryges—It is late before the Phrygians become wise*. This after-wit, as it is a proof of the truth of God, so it is a proof of the folly of men, who will look no further than they can see. They would never be persuaded to say in time, "God will be as good as his word, for he is faithful; he will deal with us according to our deserts, for he is righteous." But now they see both plainly enough when the sentence is executed; now he that runs may read, and publish the exact agreement that appears between the present providences and the former predictions which then were slighted, between the present punishments and the former sins which then were persisted in. Now they cannot but say, *The Lord is righteous*, Dan. ix. 11—13.

7 Upon the four and twentieth day

of the eleventh month, which *is* the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white. 9 Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will show thee what these *be*. 10 And the man that stood among the myrtle-trees answered and said, These *are they* whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. 11 And they answered the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle-trees, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest. 12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? 13 And the LORD answered the angel that talked with me *with* good words and comfortable words. 14 So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. 15 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen *that are* at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction. 16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. 17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

We now come to visions and revelations of the Lord; for in that way God chose to speak by Zechariah, to awaken the people's attention, and to engage their humble reverence of the word and their humble enquiries into it, and to fix it the more in their minds



and memories. Most of the following visions seem designed for the comfort of the Jews, now newly returned out of captivity, and their encouragement to go on with the building of the temple. The scope of this vision (which is as an introduction to the rest) is to assure the Jews of the care God took of them, and the eye of his providence that was upon them for good, now in their present state, when they seem to be deserted, and their case deplorable. The vision is dated (v. 7) *the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month*, three months after he preached that sermon (v. 1), in which he calls them to repentance from the consideration of God's judgments. Finding that that sermon had a good effect, and that they returned to God in a way of duty, the assurances he had given them are confirmed, that God would return to them in a way of mercy. Now observe here,

I. What the prophet saw, and the explanation of that. 1. He saw a grove of *myrtle-trees*, a dark shady grove, down in a *bottom*, hidden by the adjacent hills, so that you were not aware of it till you were just upon it. This represented the low, dark, solitary, melancholy condition of the Jewish church at this time. They were over-topped by all their neighbours, buried in obscurity; what friends they had were hidden, and there appeared no way of relief and succour for them. Note, The church has not been always visible, but sometimes hidden, as the *woman in the wilderness*, Rev. xii. 6. 2. He saw a man mounted upon a *red horse*, standing in the midst of this shady myrtle-grove. This man is no other than the *man Christ Jesus*, the same that appeared to Joshua with his sword drawn in his hand as captain of the host of the Lord (Josh. v. 13, 14) and to John with his bow and his crown, Rev. vi. 2. Though the church was in a low condition, yet Christ was present in the midst of it. Was it hidden by the hills? He was much more hidden in the myrtle-grove, yet hidden as in an ambush, ready to appear for the seasonable relief of his people, to their happy surprise. Compare Isa. xlv. 15, *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself*, and yet *Israel's God and Saviour* at the same time, their *Holy One in the midst of them*. He was riding, as a man of war, as a man in haste, *riding on the heavens for the help of his people*, Deut. xxxiii. 26. He rode on a *red horse*, either naturally so or dyed red with the blood of war, as this same victorious prince appeared *red in his apparel*, Isa. lxiii. 1, 2. Red is a fiery colour, denoting that he is *jealous for Jerusalem* (v. 14) and very angry at her enemies. Christ, under the law, appeared on a red horse, denoting the terror of that dispensation, and that he had yet his conflict before him, when he was to *resist unto blood*. But, under the gospel, he appears on a *white horse* (Rev. vi. 2, and again ch. xix. 11), denoting that he has now gained

the victory, and rides in triumph, and hangs out the white, not the bloody flag. 3. He saw a troop of horse attending him, ready to receive and obey his orders: *Behind him there were some red horses, and some speckled, and some white*, angels attending the Lord Jesus, ready to be employed by him for the service of his church, some in acts of judgment, others of mercy, others in mixed events. Note, The King of the church has angels at command, not only to do him honour, but to minister for the good of those that are his. 4. He enquired into the signification of this vision. He had an angel talking with him, as his instructor, besides those he saw in the vision; so had Ezekiel (ch. xl. 3), and Daniel, ch. viii. 16. Zechariah asked him (v. 9), *O my Lord! what are these?* And, it should seem, this angel that talked with him was Christ himself, the man on the red horse, whom the rest were attendants on; to him immediately Zechariah addresses himself. Would we be acquainted with the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, we must make our application, not to angels (they are themselves learners), but to Christ himself, who is alone able to take the book, and open the seals, Rev. v. 7. The prophet's question implies a humble acknowledgment of his own ignorance and an earnest desire to be informed. O let me know what these are! This he desired, not for the satisfying of his curiosity, but that he might be furnished with something proper for the comfort and encouragement of the people of God, in their present distress. 5. He received from the angel that talked with him (v. 9), and from the man that stood among the myrtle-trees (v. 10), the interpretation of this vision. Note, Jesus Christ is ready to instruct those that are humbly desirous to be taught the things of God. He immediately said, *I will show thee what these are*. What knowledge we have, or may have, concerning the world of spirits, we are indebted to Christ for. The account given him was, *These are those whom the Lord has sent*; they are his messengers, his envoys, appointed (as his eyes are said to do, 2 Chron. xvi. 9) to walk, to run, to fly swiftly through the earth, to observe what is done in it and to execute the divine commands. God needs them not, but he is pleased to employ them, and we need the comfort arising from the doctrine of their administration.

II. What the prophet heard, and what instructions were thereby given him. Faith comes by hearing, and, generally, in visions there was something said.

1. He heard the report or representation which the angels made to Christ of the present state of the world, v. 11. They had been out abroad, as flying posts (*being hastened by the King of kings' commandment*, Esth. iii. 15), and, having returned, they give this account to the Angel that stood among the myrtle-trees (for to the Lord Jesus angels

themselves are accountable): *We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sits still and is at rest.* We are taught to pray that the will of God may be done by men on earth as it is done by the angels in heaven; and here we see what need we have to pray so, for it is far from being so. For, (1.) We find the world of angels here very busy. Those that are employed in the court above rest not day nor night from praising God, which is their business there; and those that are employed in the camp below are never idle, nor lose time; they are still *ascending and descending upon the Son of man* (John i. 51, as on Jacob's ladder, Gen. xxviii. 12); they are still *walking to and fro through the earth.* Thus active, thus industrious, *Satan* owns himself to be in doing mischief, Job i. 7. It is well for us that good angels bestir themselves as much to do good, and that here in this earth we have guardians going about continually seeking to do us a kindness, as we have adversaries which, as roaring lions, go about continually, seeking to devour us. Though holy angels in this earth meet with a great deal that is disagreeable, yet, while they are going on God's errands, they hesitate not to *walk to and fro through it.* Their own habitation, which those that fell liked not, they will like the better when they return. (2.) We find the world of mankind here very careless: *All the earth sits still, and is at rest,* while all the church is made uneasy, *tossed with tempests and not comforted.* Those that are strangers to the church are secure; those that are enemies to it are successful. The Chaldeans and Persians dwell at ease, while the poor Jews are continually alarmed; as when *the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed.* The children of men are merry and jovial, but *none grieve for the affliction of God's children.* Note, It is sad to think what a deep sleep the world is cast into, what a spirit of slumber has seized the generality of mankind, that are under God's wrath and Satan's power, and yet secure and unconcerned! They sit still and are at rest, Luke xvii. 26, &c.

2. He heard Christ's intercession with the Father for his afflicted church, v. 12. The angels related the posture of affairs in this lower world, but we read not of any prayers they made for the redress of the grievances they had made a remonstrance of. No; it is the *Angel among the myrtle-trees* that is the great intercessor. Upon the report of the angels he immediately turned heavenward, and said, *Lord, wilt thou not have mercy on thy church?* (1.) The thing he intercedes for is *mercy*; as Ps. lxxxv. 7, *Show us thy mercy, O Lord!* Note, God's mercy is all in all to the church's comfort; and all his mercy must be hoped for through Christ's mediation. (2.) The thing he complains of is the delay of this mercy: *How long wilt*

*thou not have mercy!* He knows that *mercies through him shall be built up for ever* (Ps. lxxxix. 2), but thinks it long that the building is deferred. (3.) The objects of compassion recommended to the divine mercies are, Jerusalem, the holy city, and the other cities of Judah that were now in ruins; for God had had *indignation against them now threescore and ten years.* He mentions seventy years because that was the time fixed in the divine councils for the continuance of the captivity; so long the indignation lasted, and though *now for a little space grace* had been *shown them from the Lord their God, to give them some reviving* (Ezra ix. 8), yet the scars of those seventy years' captivity still remained so deep, so painful, that this is the melancholy string they still harp upon—the divine indignation during those seventy years. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that whereas the seventy years of the captivity were reckoned from Jehoiakim's fourth year, and ended in the first of Cyrus, these seventy years are to be computed from the eleventh of Zedekiah, when Jerusalem and the temple were burnt, about nineteen years after the first captivity, and which ended in this second year of Darius Hystaspes, about seventeen years after Cyrus's proclamation, as that seventy years mentioned ch. vii. 5 was about nineteen years after; the captivity went off, as it came on, gradually. "Lord, we are still under the burden of the seventy years' wrath, and wilt thou be angry with us for ever?"

3. He heard a gracious reply given to this intercession of Christ's for his church; for it is a prevailing intercession, always acceptable, and *him the Father heareth always* (v. 13): *The Lord answered the angel,* this angel of the covenant, *with good words and comfortable words,* with promises of mercy and deliverance, and the perfecting of what he had begun in favour to them. These were comfortable words to Christ, who is grieved in the grievances of his church, and comfortable to all that mourn with Zion. God often answers prayer with good words, when he does not immediately appear in great works; and those good words are real answers to prayer. Men's good words will not feed the body (Jam. ii. 16), but God's good words will feed the faith, for saying and doing with him are not two things, though they are with us.

4. He heard that reply which was given to the angel repeated to himself, with a commission to publish it to the children of his people, for their comfort. *The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him he signified to his servant John,* and by him *to the churches*, Rev. i. 1, 4. Thus all the good words and comfortable words of the gospel we receive from Jesus Christ, as he received them from the Father, in answer to the prayer of his blood, and his ministers are appointed to preach them to *all the world.*



Now that God would *speak comfortably to Jerusalem*, Zechariah is *the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord. The voice said, Cry. Cry then.* The prophets must now cry as loudly to show God's people their comforts as ever they did formerly to show them *their transgressions*, Isa. xl. 2, 3, 6. And if he ask, *What shall I cry?* he is here instructed. (1.) He must proclaim the wrath God has in store for the enemies of Jerusalem. He is *jealous for Zion with great jealousy*, v. 14. He takes himself to be highly affronted by the injuries and indignities that are done to his church, as he had been formerly by the iniquities found in his church. The earth *sat still and was at rest* (v. 11), not relenting at all, nor showing the least remorse, for all the mischief they had done to Jerusalem, as Joseph's brethren, who, when they had sold him, sat down to eat bread; and this God took very ill (v. 15): *I am very sorely displeased with the heathen, that are at ease, and have no concern for the afflicted church.* Much more will he be displeased with those that are *at ease in Zion* (Amos vi. 1), with Zion's own sons, that sympathize not with her in her sorrows. But this was not all; they were not only not concerned for her, but they were concerned against her: *I was but a little displeased with my people, and designed to correct them moderately, but those that were employed as instruments of the correction cast off all pity, and with the greatest rage and malice helped forward the affliction and added to it, persecuting those whom God had smitten* (Ps. lxi. 26) and insulting over those whom he had troubled. See Isa. xlvii. 6; x. 5; Ezek. xxv. 12, 15. Note, God is displeased with those who help forward the affliction even of such as suffer justly; for true humanity, in such a case, is good divinity. (2.) He must proclaim the mercy God has in store for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, v. 16. He must cry, "*Thus saith the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercies.* I was going away in wrath, but I am now returning in love. *Cry yet to the same purport*, v. 17. There must now be line upon line for consolation, as formerly there had been for conviction. *The Lord*, even the Lord of hosts, assures them, [1.] That the temple shall be built that is now but in the building. This good work which they are now about, though it meet with much discouragement, shall be perfected, and they shall have the tokens of God's presence, and opportunities of conversing with him, and worshipping him, as formerly. Note, It is good news indeed to any place to hear that God will build his house in it. [2.] That Jerusalem shall again be *built as a city compact together*, which had formerly been its glory, Ps. cxxii. 3. *A line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem*, in order to the rebuilding of it with great exactness and uniformity. [3.] That the na-

tion shall again become populous and rich, though now diminished and impoverished. Not only Jerusalem, but other cities that are reduced and lie in a little compass, shall yet *spread abroad*, or be diffused; their suburbs shall extend far, and colonies shall be transplanted from them; and this *through prosperity*: they shall be so numerous, and so wealthy, that there shall not be room for them; they shall complain that *the place is too strait*, Isa. xlix. 20. As they had been scattered and spread abroad, through their calamities, so they should now be through their prosperity. *Let thy fountains be dispersed*, Prov. v. 16. The cities that should thus increase God calls his cities; they are *blessed by him, and they are fruitful and multiply, and replenish the land*. [4.] That all their present sorrows should not only be balanced, but for ever silenced, by divine consolations: *The Lord shall yet comfort Zion*. Yet at length, though her griefs and grievances may continue long, God has comforts in reserve for Zion and all her mourners. [5.] That all this will be the fruit of God's preventing distinguishing favour: He shall yet *choose Jerusalem*, shall renew his choice, renew his covenant, shall make it appear that he has chosen Jerusalem. As he first built them up into a people when he brought them out of Egypt, so he will now rebuild them, when he brings them out of Babylon, not for any worthiness of theirs, but in pursuance of his own choice, Deut. vii. 7, 8. Jerusalem is the city he has chosen, and he will not cast it off.

18 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. 19 And I said unto the angel that talked with me, *What be these?* And he answered me, *These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.* 20 And the LORD showed me four carpenters. 21 Then said I, *What come these to do?* And he spake, saying, *These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.*

It is the comfort and triumph of the church (Isa. lix. 19) that *when the enemy shall come in like a flood, with mighty force and fury, then the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him*. Now, in this vision (the second which this prophet had), we have an illustration of that, God's Spirit making a stand, and making head, against the formidable power of the church's adversaries.

I. We have here the enemies of the church bold and daring, and threatening to be its

death, to cut off the name of Israel; such the people of God had lately been insulted by: *I looked and behold four horns* (v. 18), which are explained v. 19. They are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, that is, the Jews both in the country and in the city, because they were the Israel of God. They have tossed them (so some read it), as furious bulls with their horns toss that which they are enraged at. They have scattered them, so that no man did lift up his head, v. 21. No man durst show his face for fear of them, much less give them any opposition, or make head against them. They are horns, denoting their dignity and dominion,—horns exalted, denoting also their strength, and power, and violence. They are four horns, for the Jews are surrounded with them on every side; when they avoid one horn that pushes at them they run upon another. The men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and many of Israel that joined themselves to them, set about the building of the temple; but the enemies of that work from all sides pushed at them, and drove them from it. Rehun, and Shimshai, and the other Samaritans that opposed the building of the temple, were these horns, Ezra iv. 8. So were Sanballat and Tobiah, and the Ammonites and Arabians, that opposed the building of the wall, Neh. iv. 7. Note, The church's enemies have horns, and use them to the hindrance of every good work. The great enemy of the New-Testament church has seven heads and ten horns (Rev. xvii. 3), so that those who endeavour to do the church any service must expect to be pushed at.

II. We have here the friends of the church active and prevailing. The prophet did himself lift up his eyes and see the four horns, and saw them so formidable that he began to despair of the safety of every good man, and the success of every good work; but the Lord then showed him four carpenters, or smiths, who were empowered to cut off these horns, v. 20, 21. With an eye of sense we see the power of the enemies of the church; look which way we will, the world shows us that. But it is with an eye of faith that we see it safe, notwithstanding; it is the Lord that shows us that, as he opened the eyes of the prophet's servant to see the angelic guards round about his master, 2 Kings vi. 17. Observe, Those that were to fray or break the horns of the Gentiles, and to cast them out, were, 1. *Carpenters* or *smiths* (for they are supposed by some to have been horns of iron), men who had skill and ability to do it, whose proper business it was, and who understood their business and had tools at hand to do it with. Note, God calls those to serve the interests of his church whom he either finds, or makes, fit for it. If there be horns (which denote the force and fury of beasts) against the church, there are carpenters (which denote the wisdom and fore-

cast of men) for the church, by which they find ways to master the strongest beasts, for every kind of beasts is tamed, and has been tamed, of mankind, Jam. iii. 7. 2. They were four carpenters, as many horns so many hands to saw them off. Note, Which way soever the church is threatened with mischief, and opposition given to its interests, God can find out ways and means to check the force, to restrain the wrath, and make it turn to his praise. Some by these four carpenters understand Zerubbabel and Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, who carried on the work of God in spite of the opposition given to it. Those horned beasts broke into God's vineyard to tread it down; but the good magistrates and the good ministers whom God raised up, though they had not power to cut off the horns of the wicked (as David did, Ps. lxxv. 5, 10), yet frightened them and cast them out. Note, When God has work to do he will raise up some to do it and others to defend it and protect those that are employed in the doing of it.

## CHAP. II.

In this chapter we have, I. Another vision which the prophet saw, not for his own entertainment, but for his satisfaction and the edification of those to whom he was sent, ver. 1, 2. II. A sermon upon it, in the rest of the chapter, 1. By way of explication of the vision, showing it to be a prediction of the replenishing of Jerusalem and of its safety and honour, ver. 3—5. 2. By way of application. Here is, (1.) A use of exhortation to the Jews that were yet in Babylon, pressing them to hasten their return to their own land, ver. 6—9. (2.) A use of consolation to those that were returned, in reference to the many difficulties they had to struggle with, ver. 10—12. (3.) A use of caution to all not to prescribe to God, or limit him, but patiently to wait for him, ver. 13.

**I** LIFTED up mine eyes again, and I looked, and behold a man with a measuring-line in his hand. 2 Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. 3 And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, 4 And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: 5 For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

This prophet was ordered, in God's name, to assure the people (ch. i. 16) that a line should be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. Now here we have that promise illustrated and confirmed, that the prophet might deliver that part of his message to the people with the more clearness and assurance.

I. He sees, in a vision, a man going to measure Jerusalem (v. 1, 2): *He lifted up his eyes again, and looked.* God had shown him that which was very encouraging to him, (ch. i. 20), and therefore now he lifted up



his eyes again and looked. Note, The comfortable sights which by faith we have had of God's goodness made to pass before us should engage us to lift up our eyes again, and to search further into the discoveries made to us of the divine grace; for there is still more to be seen. In the close of the foregoing chapter he had seen Jerusalem's enemies baffled and broken, so that now he begins to hope she shall not be ruined. But that is not enough to make her happy, and therefore that is not all that is promised. Here is more carpenter's work to be done. When David had resolved to *cut off the horns of the wicked* he engaged likewise that the *horns of the righteous* should be *exalted*, Ps. lxxv. 10. And so does the *Son of David* here; for he is the *man*, even the *man Christ Jesus*, whom the prophet sees with a *measuring line in his hand*; for he is the master builder of his church (Heb. iii. 3), and he builds exactly by line and level. Zechariah took the boldness to ask him *whither he was going* and what he designed to do with that measuring line. And he readily told him that he was going to *measure Jerusalem*, to take a particular account of the dimensions of it each way, that it might be computed what was necessary for the making of a wall about it, and that it might appear, by comparing its dimensions with the vast numbers that should inhabit it, what additions were necessary to be made for the receiving and containing of them; when multitudes flock to Jerusalem (Isa. lx. 4) it is time for her to *enlarge the place of her tent*, Isa. liv. 2. Note, God takes notice of the extent of his church, and will take care that, when ever so many guests are brought in to the wedding supper, still there *shall be room*, Luke xiv. 22. In the New Jerusalem, *my Father's house* above, *there are many mansions*.

II. He is informed that this vision means well to Jerusalem, that the measuring line he saw was not a *line of confusion* (as that Isa. xxxiv. 11), not a line to mete out for destruction, as when God *purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion* he stretched out a line (Lam. ii. 8); but it is as when he *divided the inheritance by line*, Ps. lxxviii. 55. The angel that talked with the prophet *went forth*, as he designed, to *measure Jerusalem*, but another angel *went out to meet him*, to desire that he would first explain this vision to the prophet, that it might not occasion him any uneasy speculations: *Run, and speak to this young man* (for, it seems, the prophet entered upon his prophecy when he was young, yet no man ought to despise his youth when God thus highly honoured it); he is a young man, not experienced, and may be ready to fear the worst; therefore bid him hope the best; tell him that Jerusalem shall be both safe and great, 1. As safe and great as numbers of men can make it (v. 4): *Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls*; the inhabitants of it shall increase,

and multiply, and replenish it to admiration, so that it shall extend itself far beyond the present dimensions which now there is an account taken of. The walls of a city, as they defend it, so they straiten and confine it, and keep its inhabitants from multiplying beyond such a pitch; but Jerusalem, even when it is walled, to keep off the enemy, shall be inhabited *as towns without walls*. The city shall be in a manner lost in the suburbs, as London is, where the out-parishes are more populous than those within the walls. So shall it be with Jerusalem; it shall be extended as freely as if it had no walls at all, and yet shall be as safe as if it had the strongest walls, such a *multitude of men* (which are the best walls of a city) *shall there be therein*, and of *cattle too*, to be not only food, but wealth too, for those men. Note, The increase of the numbers of a people is a great blessing, is a fruit of God's blessing on them and an earnest of further blessings, Ps. cvii. 33. *They are multiplied, for he blesses them*. 2. As safe and great as the presence of God can make it, v. 5. (1.) It shall be safe, for God himself will be a *wall of fire round about it*. Jerusalem had no walls about it at this time, but lay naked and exposed; formerly, when it had walls, the enemies not only broke through them, but broke them down; but now God will be unto her a wall of fire. Some think it alludes to shepherds that made fires about their flocks, or travellers that made fires about their tents in desert places, to frighten wild beasts from them. God will not only *make a hedge* about them as he did about Job (ch. i. 10), not only make walls and bulwarks about them, Isa. xxvi. 1 (those may be battered down), not only be as the mountains round about them, Ps. cxxv. 2 (mountains may be got over), but he will be a wall of fire round them, which cannot be broken through, nor scaled, nor undermined, nor the foundations of it sapped, nor can it be attempted, or approached, without danger to the assailants. God will not only make a wall of fire about her, but he will himself be such a wall; for *our God is a consuming fire* to his and his church's enemies. He is a wall of fire, not on one side only, but round about on every side. (2.) It shall be great, for God himself *will be the glory in the midst of it*. His temple, his altar, shall be set up and attended there, and his institutions observed, and there then shall the tokens of his special presence and favour be, which will be the glory in the midst of them, will make them truly admirable in the eyes of all about them. God will have honour from them, and put honour upon them. Note, Those that have God for their God have him for their glory; those that have him in the midst of them have glory in the midst of them, and thence the church is said to be *all glorious within*. And those persons and places that have God to be the glory in the midst

of them have him for a wall of fire round about them, for *upon all that glory there is*, and shall be, a defence, Isa. iv. 5. Now all this was fulfilled in part in Jerusalem, which in process of time became a very flourishing city, and made a very great figure in those parts of the world, much beyond what could have been expected, considering how low it was brought and how long it was ere it recovered itself; but it was to have its full accomplishment in the gospel-church, which is extended far, as towns without walls, by the admission of the Gentiles into it, and which has God, the Son of God, for its prince and protector.

6 Ho, ho, *come forth*, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. 7 Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest *with* the daughter of Babylon. 8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. 9 For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me.

One would have thought that Cyrus's proclamation, which gave liberty to the captive Jews to return to their own land, would suffice to bring them all back; and that, as when Pharaoh gave them leave to quit Egypt and their house of bondage there, they would not leave a hoof behind; but it seems it had not that effect. There were about 40,000 whose spirits God stirred up to go, and they went; but many, perhaps the greater part, staid behind. The land of their captivity was to most of them the land of their nativity; they had taken root there, had gained a settlement, and many of them a very comfortable one; some perhaps had got estates and preferments there, and they did not think they could better themselves by returning to their own land. *Patria est ubicunque bene est—My country is every spot where I feel myself happy.* They had no great affection to their own land, and apprehended the difficulties in their way to it insuperable. This proceeded from a bad cause—a distrust of the power and promise of God, a love of ease and worldly wealth, and an indifference to the religion of their country and to the God of Israel himself; and it had a bad effect, for it was a tacit censure of those as foolish, rash, and given to change, that did return, and a weakening of their hands in the work of God. Such as these could not sing (Ps. cxxxvii.) in their captivity, for they had *forgot*ten thee, O Jerusalem! and were so far

from preferring thee before their chief joy that they preferred any joy before thee. Here is therefore another proclamation issued out by the God of Israel, strictly charging and commanding all his free-born subjects, wherever they were dispersed, speedily to return into their own land and render themselves at their respective posts there. They are loudly summoned (v. 6): *Ho! ho! come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord.* This fitly follows upon the promise of the rebuilding and enlarging of Jerusalem. If God will build it for them and their comfort, they must come and inhabit it for him and his glory, and not continue sneaking in Babylon. Note, The promises and privileges with which God's people are blessed should engage us, whatever it cost us, to join ourselves to them and *cast in our lot among them*. When Zion is enlarged, to make room for all God's Israel, it is the greatest madness imaginable for any of them to stay in Babylon. The captivity of a sinful state is by no means to be continued in, though a man be ever so easy upon temporal accounts. No: *Come forth and flee* with all speed, and lose no time. *Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.* To induce them to hasten their return, let them consider, 1. They are now dispersed, and are concerned to incorporate themselves for their mutual common defence (v. 6): "*I have spread you abroad as the four winds of heaven*, sent some into one corner of the world and some into another; this has been your condition a long time, and therefore you should now think of coming together again, to help one another." God owns that his scattering them was in wrath, and therefore they must take this invitation as a token of God's being willing to be reconciled to them again, so that they kicked at his kindness in refusing to accept the call. 2. They are now in bondage, and are concerned to assert their own liberty; and therefore, "*Deliver thyself, O Zion! flee from the oppressor, and make the best of thy way.* Let us see some such bold efforts and struggles to help thyself as become the generous gracious 'seed of Abraham,'" v. 7. Note, When Christ has proclaimed that deliverance to the captives which he has himself wrought out it then concerns each of us to *deliver ourselves*, to *loose ourselves from the bands of our necks* (Isa. lii. 2), and, since we are under grace, to resolve that *sin shall not have dominion over us*. Zion herself is here said to *dwell with the daughter of Babylon*, because many of the *precious sons of Zion* dwelt there, and where the people of God are there the church of God is, for it is not tied to places. Now it is not fit that Zion should dwell with the daughter of Babylon; what communion can light have with darkness? Zion will be in danger of partaking with the daughter of Babylon both in *her sins* and in *her plagues*; and therefore, "*Come out of her, my people*, Rev. xviii. 4.



*Deliver thyself, O Zion!* by a speedy return to thy own land, and do not destroy thyself by continuing in that polluted devoted land." Those that would be found among the generation of God's children must *save themselves from the untoward generation* of this world; it was St. Peter's charge to his new converts, Acts ii. 40. 3. They have seemed to be forsaken and forgotten of God, but God will now make it to appear that he espouses their cause and will plead it with jealousy, v. 8, 9. It was a discouragement to those who remained in Babylon to hear of the difficulties and oppositions which their brethren met with that had returned, by which they were still in danger of being crushed and overpowered. "And we might as well sit still" (think they) "as rise up and fall." In answer to this objection, the *angel that talked with the prophet* (that is, Jesus Christ) tells him what he had commission to do for their protection and the perfecting of their salvation, and herein he has an eye to the great redemption which, in the fulness of time, he was to be the author of. Christ, who is Jehovah, and the *Lord of hosts*, of all the hosts of heaven and earth, in both which he has a sovereign power, says, *He* (that is, the Father) *has sent me*. Note, What Jesus has done, and does, for his church against his enemies, he was sent and commissioned by the Father to do. With great satisfaction he often speaks *of the Father that sent him*. (1.) He is sent *after the glory*. After the glorious beginning of their deliverance he is sent to perfect it, for he is the finisher of that work which he is the author of. Christ is sent, in the first place, to the nation and people of the Jews, *to whom pertained the glory*, Rom. ix. 4. And he was himself the *glory of his people Israel*. But *after the glory*, after his care of them, he is *sent to the nations, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles*, by the power of his gospel to captivate them, and bring them, and every high thought among them, into obedience to himself. (2.) He is *sent to the nations that spoiled them*, to take vengeance on them for the wrongs done to Zion, when the year of his redeemed comes and the *year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*, Isa. xxxiv. 8. He is sent to *shake his hand upon them*, to lift up his mighty hand against them and to lay upon them his heavy hand, to *bruise them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*, Ps. ii. 9. Some think it intimates how easily God can subdue and humble them with the turn of his hand; it is but shaking his hand over them and the work is done. *They shall be a spoil to their servants*, shall be enslaved to those whom they had enslaved, and be plundered by those whom they had plundered. In Esther's time this was fulfilled, when the *Jews had rule over those that hated them* (Esth ix. 1), and often in the time of the Maccabees. The promise is further fulfilled in Christ's victory over our spiritual enemies, his *spoiling principa-*

*lities and powers and making a show of them openly*, Col. ii. 15. And it is still in force to the gospel-church. Christ will reckon with all that are enemies to it, and sooner or later will make them *his footstool*, Ps. cx. 1; Rev. iii. 9. (3.) What he will do for his church shall be an evident proof of God's tender care of it and affection to it: *He that touches you touches the apple of his eye*. This is a high expression of God's love to his church. By his resentment of the injuries done to her it appears how dear she is to him, how he interests himself in all her interests, and takes what is done against her, not only as done against himself, but as done against the very apple of his eye, the tenderest part, which nature has made very fine, has put a double guard upon, and taught us to be in a special manner careful of, and which the least touch is a great offence to. This encourages the people of God to pray with David (Ps. xvii. 8), *Keep me as the apple of thy eye*; and engages them to do as Solomon directs (Prov. vii. 2), *to keep his law as the apple of their eye*. Some understand it thus: "*He that touches you touches the apple of his own eye*"; whoever do you any injury will prove, in the issue, to have done the greatest injury to themselves." (4.) It shall be an evident proof of Christ's mission: *You shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me* to be the protector of his church, that the promises made to the church are yea and amen in him. Christ's victory over our spiritual enemies proves that the Father sent him and was with him.

10 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. 11 And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. 12 And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again. 13 Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

Here is, I. Joy proclaimed to the church of God, to the *daughter of Zion*, that had separated herself from the *daughter of Babylon*. The Jews that had returned were in distress and danger, their enemies in the neighbourhood were spiteful against them, their friends that remained in Babylon were cool towards them, shy of them, and declined coming in to their assistance; and yet they are directed to *sing*, and to *rejoice* even in tribulation. Note, Those that have recovered their purity, and integrity, and spiritual liberty, though they have not yet

recovered their outward prosperity, have reason to sing and rejoice, to give glory to God and take comfort to themselves.

I. God will have a people among them. If their brethren in Babylon will not come to them, those of other nations shall, and shall replenish Jerusalem and the cities of Judah: *Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day* that are now at a distance from him and strangers to him. The Jewish nation, after the captivity, multiplied very much, by the accession of proselytes to it, that were naturalized, and were entitled to all the privileges of native Israelites, and perhaps they were equal in number; and therefore Paul mentions it as an honour to him which many Jews had not, that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, *a Hebrew of the Hebrews*, Phil. iii. 5. And this was an earnest of the bringing in of the Gentiles into the Christian church, and in that this and other similar promises were to have their full accomplishment. It was therefore strange that that should be so great an offence to the Jews, as we find it was in the apostles' times, which was promised them as a blessing in the prophets' times—that *many nations should be joined to the Lord*. And, as there had been one law, so should there be one gospel for the stranger and for those born in the land; whatever nation they come from, when they join themselves to the Lord, they shall be my people, as dear to God as ever Israel had been. Note, God will own those for his people who with purpose of heart join themselves to him; and, when many do so, we ought to look upon them, not with a jealous eye, but with a joyful one. Angels rejoice, and therefore so should the daughter of Zion, when many nations are joined to the Lord.

II. They shall have his presence among them: *Sing and rejoice, for I come*. Those to whom God comes have reason to rejoice, for he will be to them their chief joy. God will come, not to make them a visit only, but to reside with them and preside over them: *I will dwell in the midst of thee* (v. 10), and it is repeated (v. 11), because it was to have a double accomplishment, 1. In the dedication of the temple, in their regularly observing all God's institutions there and God's owning them therein. Those have God dwelling in the midst of them that have his ordinances administered in their purity, and a divine power going along with them; with these tokens of God's presence the Jewish church was blessed, after this, as much as ever. 2. In the incarnation of Christ. He that here promises to dwell among them is that *Lord whom the Lord of hosts has sent* (v. 11), and therefore must be the Lord Jesus, who came and dwelt in the midst of the Jewish nation, the eternal Word, that was made flesh, and dwelt among us. This was the great honour reserved for that nation in its last days; the promise of it effectually secured their continuance till it was accomplished. They could not be de-

stroyed while that blessing was in them; and the prospect of it, according to the promise, was the great support and comfort of those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. It is promised that when Christ comes and dwells among them *they shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent him*; all that were Israelites indeed were made to know it; sufficient proofs were given of it by the miracles Christ wrought, so that they might have known it, and yet there were those that perished in ignorance and unbelief, that would not know it, for, *if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.

III. They shall have all their ancient dignities and privileges restored to them again, v. 12. 1. Canaan shall be a holy land again, not polluted by sin as it had been formerly, not profaned by the enemies as it had been of late; it shall be an enclosure again, and not laid in common. 2. Judah shall be in this holy land, shall inhabit it, and enjoy the comfort of it, and no longer be lost and scattered in Babylon. 3. Judah shall be God's portion, which he will delight in, which shall be dear to him, by which he will be served, and in which he will be glorified. *The Lord's portion is his people*. 4. God will inherit Judah again as *his portion*, will claim his interest, and recover the possession out of the hands of those that had invaded his right. He will protect his people and govern them as a man does his inheritance, and will be at home among them. 5. He will choose Jerusalem again, as he had chosen it formerly, to put his name there; he will renew and confirm the choice, and continue it a chosen place, till it must resign its honours to the Jerusalem that is from above. Though the election seemed to be set aside for a while, yet it shall obtain.

II. Here is silence proclaimed to all the world besides, v. 13. The daughter of Zion must sing, but *all flesh must be silent*. Observe here, 1. A very awful description of God's appearances for the relief of his people. He is raised up out of his holy habitation; as a man out of sleep (Ps. xlv. 23; lxxviii. 65), or as a man entering with resolution upon a business that he will go through with. Heaven is his holy habitation above; thence we must expect him to appear, Isa. lxiv. 1. His temple is so in this lower world; thence from between the cherubim he will shine forth, Ps. lxxx. 1. He is about to do something unusual, unexpected, and very surprising, and to plead his people's cause, which had long seemed neglected. 2. A seasonable caution and direction at such a time: *Be silent, O all flesh! before the Lord*—before Christ and his grace (let not flesh object against the methods he takes)—before God and his providence; the enemies of the church shall be silenced; all iniquity shall stop her mouth. The friends of the church also must be silent. Leave it to God to take his own way, and neither prescribe to him



what he should do nor quarrel with him whatever he does. *Be still, and know that he is God. Stand still, and see his salvation.* See Hab. ii. 20; Zeph. i. 7. Silently acquiesce in his holy will, and patiently wait the issue, as those who are assured that when God is *raised up out of his holy habitation* he will not retreat, nor sit down again, till he has accomplished his whole work.

### CHAP. III.

The vision in the foregoing chapter gave assurances of the re-establishing of the civil interests of the Jewish nation, the promises of which terminated in Christ. Now the vision in this chapter concerns their church-state, and their ecclesiastical interests, and assures them that they shall be put into a good posture again; and the promises of this also have an eye to Christ, who is not only our prince, but the high priest of our profession, of whom Joshua was a type. Here is, I. A vision relating to Joshua, as the representative of the church in his time, representing the disadvantages he laboured under, and the people in him, with the redress of the grievances of both. 1. He is accused by Satan, but is brought off by Christ, ver. 1, 2. 2. He appears in filthy garments, but has them changed, ver. 3—5. 3. He is assured of being established in his office if he conduct himself well, ver. 6, 7. II. A sermon relating to Christ, who is here called "The branch," who should be endued with all perfections for his undertaking, should be carried triumphantly through it, and by whom we should have pardon and peace, ver. 8—10.

AND he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. 5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by. 6 And the angel of the LORD protested unto Joshua, saying, 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.

There was a Joshua that was a principal agent in the first settling of Israel in Canaan; here is another of the same name very active in their second settlement there after the captivity; Jesus is the same name, and it signifies *Saviour*; and they were both figures of him that was to come, our chief

captain and our chief priest. The angel that talked with *Zechariah* showed him *Joshua the high priest*; it is probable that the prophet saw him frequently, that he spoke to him, and that there was a great intimacy between them; but, in his common views, he only saw how he appeared before men; if he must know how he stands before the Lord, it must be shown him in vision; and so it is shown him. And men are really as they are with God, not as they appear in the eye of the world. He stood *before the angel of the Lord*, that is, before Christ, the Lord of the angels, to whom even the high priests themselves, of Aaron's order, were accountable. He stood *before the angel of the Lord*, to execute his office, to minister to God under the inspection of the angels. He stood to consult the oracle on the behalf of Israel, for whom, as high priest, he was agent. Guilt and corruption are our two great discouragements when we stand before God. By the guilt of the sins committed by us we have become obnoxious to the justice of God; by the power of the sin that dwells in us we have become odious to the holiness of God. All God's Israel are in danger upon these two accounts. Joshua was so here, for *the law made men priests that had infirmity*, Heb. vii. 28. And, as to both, we have relief from Jesus Christ, who is made of God to us both *righteousness and sanctification*.

I. Joshua is accused as a criminal, but is justified. 1. A violent opposition is made to him. *Satan stands at his right hand to resist him*, to be a *Satan to him*, a *law-adversary*. He stands at his right hand, as the prosecutor, or witness, at the right hand of the prisoner. Note, The devil is the accuser of the brethren, that *accuses them before God day and night*, Rev. xii. 10. Some think the chief priest was accused for the sin of many of the inferior priests, in marrying strange wives, which they were much guilty of after their return out of captivity, Ezra ix. 1, 2; Neh. xiii. 28. When God is about to re-establish the priesthood Satan objects the sins that were found among the priests, as rendering them unworthy the honour designed them. It is by our own folly that we give Satan advantage against us and furnish him with matter for reproach and accusation; and if any thing be amiss, especially with the priests, Satan will be sure to aggravate it and make the worst of it. He stood *to resist him*, that is, to oppose the service he was doing for the public good. He stood *at his right hand*, the hand of action, to discourage him, and raise difficulties in his way. Note, When we stand before God to minister to him, or stand up for God to serve his interests, we must expect to meet with all the resistance that Satan's subtlety and malice can give us. Let us then resist him that resists us and he shall flee from us. 2. A victorious defence is

raade for him (v. 2): *The Lord* (that is, the Lord Christ) *said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee.* Note, It is the happiness of the saints that the Judge is their friend; the same that they are accused to is their patron and protector, and an advocate for them, and he will be sure to bring them off. (1.) Satan is here checked by one that has authority, that has conquered him, and many a time silenced him. *The accuser of the brethren*, of the ministers and the ministry, *is cast out*; his indictments are quashed, and his suggestions against them, as well as his suggestions to them, are shown to be malicious, frivolous, and vexatious. *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!* *The Lord said* (that is, the Lord our Redeemer), *The Lord rebuke thee*, that is, the Lord the Creator. The power of God is engaged for the making of the grace of Christ effectual. “*The Lord restrain thy malicious rage, reject thy malicious charge, and revenge upon thee thy enmity to a servant of his*.” Note, those that belong to Christ have him ready to appear vigorously for them when Satan appears most vehement against them. He does not parley with him, but stops his mouth immediately with this sharp reprimand: *The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan!* This is the best way of dealing with that furious enemy. *Get thee behind me, Satan.* (2.) Satan is here argued with. He resists the priest, but let him know that his resistance, [1.] Will be fruitless; it will be to no purpose to attempt any thing against Jerusalem, for *the Lord has chosen it*, and he will abide by his choice. Whatever is objected against God’s people, God saw it; he foresaw it when he chose them and yet he chose them, and therefore that can be no inducement to him now to reject them; he knew the worst of them when he chose them; and his election shall obtain. [2.] It is unreasonable; for *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* Joshua is so, and the priesthood, and the people, whose representative he is. Christ has not that to say for them for which they are to be praised, but that for which they are to be pitied. Note, Christ is ready to make the best of his people, and takes notice of every thing that is pleadable in excuse of their infirmities, so far is he from being extreme to mark what they do amiss. They have been lately in the fire; no wonder that they are black and smoked, and have the smell of fire upon them, but they are therefore to be excused, not to be accused. One can expect no other than that those who but the other day were captives in Babylon should appear very mean and despicable. They have been lately brought out of great affliction; and is Satan so barbarous as to desire to have them thrown into affliction again? They have been wonderfully delivered out of the fire, that God might be glorified in them; and will he then cast them off and abandon them? No, he

will not quench the smoking flax, the smoking fire-brand; for he snatched it out of the fire because he intended to make use of it. Note, Narrow escapes from imminent danger are happy presages and powerful pleas for more eminent favours. A converted soul is a *brand plucked out of the fire* by a miracle of free grace, and therefore shall not be left to be a prey to Satan.

II. Joshua appears as one polluted, but is purified; for he represents the Israel of God, who are all *as an unclean thing*, till they are washed and sanctified *in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*. Now observe here, 1. The impurity wherein Joshua appeared (v. 3): *He was clothed*, not only in coarse, but in *filthy garments*, such as did very ill become the dignity of his office and the sanctity of his work. By the law of Moses the garments of the high priest were to be *for glory and for beauty*, Exod. xxviii. 2. But Joshua’s garments were a shame and reproach to him; yet in them *he stood before the angel of the Lord*; he had no clean linen wherein to minister and to do the duty of his place. Now this intimates, not only that the priesthood was poor and despised, and loaded with contempt, but that there was a great deal of iniquity cleaving to the holy things. The returned Jews were so taken up with their troubles that they thought they needed not complain of their sins, and were not aware that those were the great hindrances of the progress of God’s work among them; because they were free from idolatry they thought themselves chargeable with no iniquity. But God showed them there were many things amiss in them, which retarded the advances of God’s favours towards them. There were spiritual enemies warring against them, more dangerous than any of the neighbouring nations. The Chaldee paraphrase says, *Joshua had sons who took unto them wives which were not lawful for the priests to take*; and we find it was so, Ezra x. 18. And, no doubt, there were other things amiss in the priesthood, Mal. ii. 1. Yet Joshua was permitted to *stand before the angel of the Lord*. Though his children did not as they should, yet the covenant of priesthood was not broken. Note, Christ bears with his people, whose hearts are upright with him, and admits them into communion with himself, notwithstanding their manifold infirmities. 2. The provision that was made for his cleansing. Christ gave orders to the angels that attended him, and were ready to do his pleasure, to put Joshua into a better state. Joshua presented himself before the Lord in his filthy garments, as an object of his pity; and Christ graciously looked upon him with compassion, and not, as justly he might have done, with indignation. Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua’s garments, yet did not put him away, but put them away. Thus God by his grace does with



those whom he chooses to be priests to himself; he parts between them and their sins, and so prevents their sins parting between them and their God; he reconciles himself to the sinner, but not to the sin. Two things are here done for Joshua, representing a double work of divine grace wrought in and for believers:—(1.) His filthy garments are taken from him, *v. 4*. The meaning of this is given us in what Christ said, and he said it as one having authority, *Behold, I have caused thy iniquity to pass from thee*. The guilt of it is taken away by pardoning mercy, the stench and stain of it by peace spoken to the conscience, and the power of it broken by renewing grace. When God forgives our sins he *causes our iniquity to pass from us*, that it may not appear against us, to condemn us; it passes from us *as far as the east is from the west*. When he sanctifies the nature he enables us to *put off the old man*, to cast away from us the filthy rags of our corrupt affections and lusts, as things we will never have any thing more to do with, will never gird to us or appear in. Thus Christ *washes those from their sins in his own blood* whom he *makes to our God kings and priests*, *Rev. i. 5, 6*. Either we must be cleansed from the pollutions of sin or we shall, *as polluted, be put from that priesthood*, *Ezra ii. 62*. (2.) He is clothed anew, has not only the shame of his filthiness removed, but the shame of his nakedness covered: *I will clothe thee with change of raiment*. Joshua had no clean linen of his own, but Christ will provide for him, for he will not let a priesthood of his own instituting be lost, be either contemptible before men or unacceptable before God. The change of raiment here is rich costly raiment, such as is worn on high days. Joshua shall appear as lovely as ever he appeared loathsome. Those that minister in holy things shall not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; God will make them wise, and humble, and diligent, and faithful, and examples of every thing that is good; and then Joshua is clothed with change of raiment. Thus those whom Christ makes spiritual priests are clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness and appear before God in that, and with the graces of his Spirit, which are ornaments to them. *The righteousness of saints*, both imputed and implanted, is the fine linen, clean and white, with which the *bride, the Lamb's wife*, is arrayed, *Rev. xix. 8*.

III. Joshua is in danger of being turned out of office; but, instead of that, he is re-installed and established in his office. He not only has his sins pardoned, and is furnished with grace sufficient for himself, but, as *rectus in curia—acquitted in court*, he is restored to his former honours and trusts.

1. The crown of the priesthood is put upon him, *v. 5*. This was done at the special instance and request of the prophet: I said,

*"Let them set a fair mitre upon his head, as a badge of his office. Now that he looks clean, let him also look great; let him be dressed up in all the garments of the high priest."* Note, When God designs the restoring or reviving of religion he stirs up his prophets and people to pray for it, and does it in answer to their prayers. Zechariah prayed that the angels might be ordered to set the mitre on Joshua's head, and they did it immediately, and *clothed him with the priestly garments*; for no man took this honour to himself, *but he that was called of God* to it. *The angel of the Lord stood by*, as having the oversight of the work which the created angels were employed in. He stood by, as one well pleased with it, and resolved to stand by the orders he had given for the doing of it and to continue his presence with that priesthood. 2. The covenant of the priesthood is renewed with him, which is called *God's covenant of peace*, *Num. xxv. 12*. Mr. Pemble calls it *the patent of his office*, which is here declared and delivered to him before witnesses, *v. 6, 7*. The angel of the Lord, having taken care to make him fit for his office (and all that God calls to any office he either finds fit or makes so), invests him in it. And though he is not *made a priest with an oath* (that honour is reserved for him who is a priest after the order of Melchisedek, *Heb. vii. 21*), yet, being a type of him, he is inaugurated with a solemn declaration of the terms upon which he held his office. The angel of the Lord protested to Joshua that, if he would be sure to do the duty of his place, he should enjoy the dignity and reward of it. Now see, (1.) What the conditions are upon which he enters into his office. Let him know that he is upon his good behaviour; he must *walk in God's ways*, that is, he must live a good life and be holy in all manner of conversation; he must go before the people in the paths of God's commandments, and walk circumspectly. He must also *keep God's charge*, must carefully do all the services of the priesthood, and must see to it that the inferior priests performed the duties of their place decently and in order. He must *take heed to himself, and to all the flock*, *Acts xx. 28*. Note, Good ministers must be good Christians; yet that is not enough: they have a trust committed to them, they are charged with it, and they must keep it with all possible care, that they may give up their account of it with joy, *1 Tim. vi. 14*. (2.) What the privileges are which we may expect, and be assured of, in the due discharge of his office. His patent runs, *Quamdiu se bene gesserit—During good behaviour*. Let him be sure to do his part, and God will own him. [1.] *"Thou shalt judge my house; thou shalt preside in the affairs of the temple, and the inferior priests shall be under thy direction."* Note, The power of the church, and of church

rulers, is not a legislative, but only a judicial power. The high priest might not make any new laws for God's house, nor ordain any other rites of worship than what God had ordained; but he must judge God's house, that is, he must see to it that God's laws and ordinances were punctually observed, must protect and encourage those that did observe them, and enquire into and punish the violation of them. [2.] "*Thou shalt also keep my courts; thou shalt have oversight of what is done in all the courts of the temple, and shalt keep them pure and in good order for the worship to be performed in them.*" Note, Ministers are God's stewards, and they are to keep his courts, in honour of him who is the chief Lord and for the preserving of equity and good order among his tenants. [3.] "*I will give thee places to walk among those that stand by, among these angels that are inspectors and assistants in this instalment.*" They shall stand by while Joshua is at work for God, and shall be as a guard to him, or he shall be highly honoured and respected as an *angel of God*, Gal. iv. 14. Ministers are called *angels*, Rev. i. 20. Those that *walk in God's ways* may be said to *walk among the angels* themselves, for they do the will of God as the angels do it that are in heaven, and are their *fellow-servants*, Rev. xix. 10. Some make it a promise of eternal life, and of a reward of his fidelity in the future state. Heaven is not only a palace, a place to repose in, but a paradise, a garden, a place to walk in; and there are walks among the angels, in society with that holy and glorious company. See Ezek. xxviii. 14.

8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant, The BRANCH. 9 For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone *shall* be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree.

As the promises made to David often slide insensibly into promises of the Messiah, whose kingdom David's was a type of, so the promises here made to Joshua immediately rise as far upward, and look as far forward, as to Christ, whose priesthood Joshua's was now a shadow of, not only in general, as it kept up the line of Aaron's priesthood, but especially as it was the reviving of that happy method of correspondence between heaven and earth, to which a

great interruption had been given by the iniquity and captivity of Israel. Christ is a high priest, as Joshua was, for sinners and sufferers, to mediate for those that have been under guilt and wrath. And it was fit that Joshua should understand the priesthood of Christ, because all the virtue of his priesthood, its value and usefulness to the church, depended upon and was derived from the priesthood of Christ. See,

I. To whom this promise of Christ is directed (v. 8): "*Hear now, O Joshua!*" Thou hast heard with pleasure what belongs to thyself; but, behold, a greater than Joshua is at hand. *Hear now* concerning him, *thou* and the rest of the priests, *thy fellows, who sit before thee*, at thy feet, as learners, but whom thou art to look upon as *thy fellows*, for all you are brethren; let the high priest, and all the inferior priests, take notice of this, for they are *men wondered at*." They are set *for signs*, for types and figures of Christ's priesthood. What God now did for Joshua and his fellows was a happy omen of the coming of the Messiah promised, and would be so interpreted, with a pleasing wonder, by all that had understanding of the times. Or they are *men wondered at* for their singularity, hooted at as strange sort of people, because they *run not with others to the same excess of riot* (1 Pet. iv. 4), or for their strange afflictions and surprising deliverance out of them, as Ps. lxxi. 7, *I am as a wonder unto many*. They are *men of wonder*; they are a wonder to themselves, are amazed to think how happily their condition is altered. God's people and ministers are, upon many accounts, *men wondered at*. The high priest and his fellows here (as the prophet and his children, Isa. viii. 18) are for signs and for wonders. But men's wonder at them will cease when the Messiah comes, as the stars are eclipsed by the light of the sun; for *his name shall be called Wonderful*.

II. The promise itself, which consists of several parts, all designed for the comfort and encouragement of Joshua and his friends in that great good work of building the temple, which they were now engaged in. An eye to Christ, and a believing dependence upon the promises relating to him and his kingdom, would carry them through the difficulties they met with in that and their other services. 1. The Messiah shall come: *Behold, I will bring forth my servant the branch*. He has been long hid, but the fulness of time is now at hand, when he shall be brought forth into the world, brought forth among his people Israel. God himself undertakes to bring him forth, and therefore, no doubt, he will own him and stand by him. He is God's servant, employed in his work, obedient to his will, and entirely devoted to his honour and glory. He is the branch; so he was called Isa. iv. 2, *The branch of the Lord*. Isa. xi. 1, *A branch out of the roots*



of Jesse. Jer. xxiii. 5, *A righteous branch*; and Jer. xxiii. 15, *The branch of righteousness*. His beginning was small, as a tender branch, but in time he should become a great tree and fill the earth, Isa. liii. 2. He is the branch from which all our fruit must be gathered. 2. Many eyes shall be upon him. He is the stone laid before Joshua, alluding to the foundation, or chief corner-stone, of the temple, which probably was laid, with great solemnity, in the presence of Joshua. Christ is not only the branch, which is the beginning of a tree, but the foundation, which is the beginning of a building; and, when he shall be brought forth, *seven eyes shall be upon him*. The eye of his Father was upon him, to take care of him, and protect him, especially in his sufferings; when he was buried in the grave, as the foundation-stones are under ground, the eyes of Heaven were still upon him, buried out of men's sight, but not out of God's. The eyes of all the prophets and Old-Testament saints were upon this one stone; Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he saw it and was glad. The eyes of all believers are upon him; they look unto him and are saved, as the eyes of the stung Israelites were upon the brazen serpent. Some understand this one stone to have the seven eyes in it as the wheels had in Ezekiel's vision, and think it denotes that perfection of wisdom and knowledge which Jesus Christ was endued with, for the good of his church. *His eyes run to and fro through the earth*. 3. God himself will beautify him, and put honour upon him: *I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts*. This stone the builders refused, as rough and unsightly; but God undertakes to smooth and polish it, nay, and to carve it so that it shall be the *head stone of the corner*, the most beautiful in all the building. Christ was God's workmanship; and abundance of his wisdom appears in the contrivance of our redemption, which will appear when the engraving is perfected. This stone is a *precious stone*, though laid for a foundation; and the graving of it seems to allude to the precious stones in the breast-plate of the high priest, which had the names of the tribes graven upon them, as the engraving of a signet, Exod. xxviii. 21, 22. In that breast-plate there were twelve stones laid before Aaron, and for aught that appears those were lost; but there shall be one worth them all laid before Joshua, and that is Christ himself. This precious stone shall sparkle as if it had seven eyes; there shall appear a perfection of wisdom and prudence in the oracles that proceed from the breast-plate of judgment. And God will engrave the engraving thereof; he will entrust Christ with all his elect, and he shall appear as their representative, and agent for them, as the high priest did when he went in before the Lord with the names of all Israel engraven in the precious stones of his breast-plate.

When God gave a remnant to Christ to be brought through grace to glory, then he engraved the graving of this precious stone. 4. By him sin shall be taken away, both the guilt and the dominion of it: *I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day*. When the high priest had the names of Israel engraven on the precious stones he was adorned with he is said to *bear the iniquity of the holy things* (Exod. xxviii. 38); but the law made *nothing perfect*, Heb. x. 1. He bore the iniquity of the land, as a type of Christ; but he could not remove it; the doing of that was reserved for Christ, that blessed *Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world*; and he did it in one day, that day in which he suffered and died; that was done by the sacrifice offered that day which could not be done by the sacrifices of ages before, no, not by all the days of atonement which from Moses to Christ returned every year. This agrees with the angel's prediction (Dan. ix. 24): *He shall finish transgression and make an end of sin*. And some make the engravings wherewith God engraved him to signify the wounds and stripes which were given to his blessed body, which he underwent for our transgression, for our iniquity, and by which we are healed. 5. The effect of all this shall be the sweet enjoyment which all believers shall have of themselves, and the sweet communion they shall have with one another (v. 10): *In that day you shall call every man his neighbour under the vine and the fig-tree*, which yield most pleasant fruit, and whose leaves also afford a refreshing shade for arbours. When iniquity is taken away, (1.) We reap precious benefits and privileges from our justification, more precious than the products of the vine or the fig-tree, Rom. v. 1. (2.) We repose in a sweet tranquillity and are quiet from the fear of evil. What should terrify us when iniquity is taken away, when nothing can hurt us? We sit down under Christ's shadow with delight, and by it are sheltered from the scorching heat of the curse of the law. We live as Israel in the peaceable reign of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 24, 25); for he is the prince of peace. (3.) We ought to invite others to come to partake with us in the enjoyment of these privileges, to call every man his neighbour to come and sit with him, for mutual converse, under the vine and fig-tree, and to share with him in the fruits he is surrounded with. Gospel-grace, as far as it comes with power, makes men neighbourly; and those that have the comfort of acquaintance with Christ themselves, and communion with God through him, will be forward to court others to it. *Let us go unto the house of the Lord*.

## CHAP. IV.

In this chapter we have another comfortable vision, which, as it was explained to the prophet, had much in it for the encouragement of the people of God in their present straits, which were so great that they thought their case helpless, that their temple could never be rebuilt nor their city replenished; and therefore the scope

of the vision is to show that God would, by his own power, perfect the work, though the assistance given to it by its friends were ever so weak, and the resistance given to it by its enemies were ever so strong. Here is, I. The awakening of the prophet to observe the vision, ver. 1. II. The vision itself, of a candlestick with seven lamps, which were supplied with oil, and kept burning, immediately from two olive-trees that grew by it, one on either side, ver. 2, 3. III. The general encouragement hereby intended to be given to the builders of the temple to go on in that good work, assuring them that it should be brought to perfection at last, ver. 4-10. IV. The particular explication of the vision, for the illustration of these assurances, ver. 11-14.

AND the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, 2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: 3 And two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. 4 So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? 5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. 6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. 7 Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. 8 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. 10 For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

Here is, I. The prophet prepared to receive the discovery that was to be made to him: *The angel that talked with him came and waked him*, v. 1. It seems, though he was in conference with an angel, and about matters of great and public concern, yet he grew dull and fell asleep, as it should seem, while the angel was yet talking with him. Thus the

disciples, when they saw Christ transfigured, were heavy with sleep, Luke ix. 32. The prophet's spirit, no doubt, was willing to attend to that which was to be seen and heard, but the flesh was weak; his body could not keep pace with his soul in divine contemplations; the strangeness of the visions perhaps stupified him, and so he was overcome with sleep, or perhaps the sweetness of the visions composed him and even sung him asleep. Daniel was in a deep sleep when he heard the voice of the angel's words, Dan. x. 9. We shall never be fit for converse with spirits till we have got clear of these bodies of flesh. It should seem, the angel let him lose himself a little, that he might be fresh to receive new discoveries, but then waked him, to his surprise, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep. Note, We need the Spirit of God, not only to make known to us divine things, but to make us take notice of them. *He wakens morning by morning, he wakens my ear*, Isa. l. 4. We should beg of God that, whenever he speaks to us, he would awaken us, and we should then stir up ourselves.

II. The discovery that was made to him when he was thus prepared. The angel asked him, *What seest thou?* v. 2. When he was awake perhaps he would not have taken notice of what was presented to his view if he had not thus been excited to look about him. When he observed he saw a golden candlestick, such a one as was in the temple formerly, and with the like this temple should in due time be furnished. The church is a candlestick, set up for the enlightening of this dark world and the holding forth of the light of divine revelation to it. The candle is God's; the church is but the candlestick, but all of gold, denoting the great worth and excellence of the church of God. This golden candlestick had seven lamps branching out from it, so many sockets, in each of which was a burning and shining light. The Jewish church was but one, and though the Jews that were dispersed, it is probable, had synagogues in other countries, yet they were but as so many lamps belonging to one candlestick; but now, under the gospel, Christ is the centre of unity, and not Jerusalem, or any one place; and therefore seven particular churches are represented, not as seven lamps, but as seven several golden candlesticks, Rev. i. 20. This candlestick had one bowl, or common receiver, on the top, into which oil was continually dropping, and from it, by seven secret pipes, or passages, it was diffused to the seven lamps, so that, without any further care, they received oil as fast as they wasted it (as in those which we call fountain-pens, or fountain-pens); they never wanted, nor were ever glutted, and so kept always burning clear. And the bowl too was continually supplied, without any care or attendance of man; for (v. 3) he saw two



*olive-trees*, one on each side the candlestick, that were so fat and fruitful that of their own accord they poured plenty of oil continually into the bowl, which by two larger pipes (v. 12) dispersed the oil to smaller ones and so to the lamps; so that nobody needed to attend this candlestick, to furnish it with oil (it tarried not for man, nor waited for the sons of men), the scope of which is to show that God easily can, and often does, accomplish his gracious purposes concerning his church by his own wisdom and power, without any art or labour of man, and that though sometimes he makes use of instruments, yet he neither needs them nor is tied to them, out can do his work without them, and will rather than it shall be undone.

III. The enquiry which the prophet made concerning the meaning of this, and the gentle reproof given him for his dulness (v. 4). *I answered and spoke to the angel, saying, What are these, my lord?* Observe how respectfully he speaks to the angel; he calls him *my lord*. Those that would be taught must give honour to their teachers. He saw what these *were*, but asked what these *signified*. Note, It is very desirable to know the meaning of God's manifestations of himself and his mind both in his word and by his ordinances and providences. *What mean you by these services, by these signs?* And those that would understand the mind of God must be inquisitive. *Then shall we know if we follow on to know, if we not only hear, but, as Christ, ask questions upon what we hear,* Luke ii. 46. The angel answered him with a question, *Knowest thou not what these be?* intimating that if he had considered, and compared spiritual things with spiritual, he might have guessed at the meaning of these things; for he knew that there was a golden candlestick in the tabernacle, which it was the priests' constant business to supply with oil and to keep burning, for the use of the tabernacle; when therefore he saw, in vision, such a candlestick, with lamps always kept burning, and yet no priests to attend it, nor any occasion for them, he might discern the meaning of this to be that though God had set up the priesthood again, yet he could carry on his own work for and in his people without them. Note, We have reason to be ashamed of ourselves that we do not more readily apprehend the meaning of divine discoveries. The angel asked the prophet this question, to draw from him an acknowledgment of his own dulness, and darkness, and slowness to understand, and he had it immediately: "*I said, No, my lord; I know not what these are.*" Visions had their significance, but often dark and hard to be understood, and the prophets themselves were not always aware of it at first. But those that would be taught of God must see and acknowledge their own ignorance, and their need to be taught, and must apply to God for instruction. To him that gave us

the cabinet we must apply for the key wherewith to unlock it. God will teach the meek and humble, not those that are conceited of themselves and lean on the broken reed of their own understanding.

IV. The general intention of this vision. Without a critical descant upon every circumstance of the vision, the design of it is to assure the prophet, and by him the people, that this good work of building the temple should, by the special care of divine Providence, and the immediate influence of divine grace, be brought to a happy issue, though the enemies of it were many and mighty and the friends and furtherers of it few and feeble. Note, In the explication of visions and parables, we must look at the principal scope of them, and be satisfied with that, if that be clear, though we may not be able to account for every circumstance, or accommodate it to our purpose. The angel lets the prophet know, in general, that this vision was designed to illustrate a word which the Lord had to say to Zerubbabel, to encourage him to go on with the building of the temple. Let him know that he is a worker together with God in it, and that it is a work which God will own and crown.

1. God will carry on and complete this work, as he had begun their deliverance from Babylon, not by external force, but by secret operations and internal influences upon the minds of men. He says this who is the *Lord of hosts*, and could do it *vi et armis—by force*, has legions at command; but he will do it, *not by human might or power, but by his own Spirit*. What is done by his Spirit is done by might and power, but it stands in opposition to visible force. Israel was brought out of Egypt, and into Canaan, by might and power; in both these works of wonder great slaughter was made. But they were brought out of Babylon, and into Canaan the second time, *by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts* working upon the spirit of Cyrus, and inclining him to proclaim liberty to them, and working upon the spirits of the captives, and inclining them to accept the liberty offered them. It was by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts* that the people were excited and animated to build the temple; and therefore they are said to be *helped by the prophets of God*, because they, as the Spirit's mouth, spoke to their hearts, Ezra v. 2. It was by the same Spirit that the heart of Darius was inclined to favour and further that good work and that the sworn enemies of it were infatuated in their councils, so that they could not hinder it as they designed. Note, The work of God is often carried on very successfully when yet it is carried on very silently, and without the assistance of human force; the gospel-temple is built, not by might or power (*for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*), but by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, whose work on men's consciences is mighty to the pulling down of



strong-holds; thus the excellency of the power is of God, and not of man. When instruments fail, let us therefore leave it to God to do his work himself by his own Spirit.

2. All the difficulties and oppositions that lie in the way shall be got over and removed, even those that seem insuperable (v. 7): *Who art thou, O great mountain?* Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. See here, (1.) How the difficulty is represented; it is a *great mountain*, impassable and immovable, a heap of rubbish, like a great mountain, which must be got away, or the work cannot go on. The enemies of the Jews are proud and hard as great mountains; but, when God has work to do, the mountains that stand in the way of it shall dwindle into mole-hills; for see here, (2.) How these difficulties are despised: "*Who art thou, O great mountain!* that thou shouldst stand in God's way and think to stop the progress of his work? Who art thou that lookest so big, that thus threatenest, and art thus feared? Before Zerubbabel, when he is God's agent, *thou shalt become a plain*. All the difficulties shall vanish, and all the objections be got over. *Every mountain and hill shall be brought low* when the *way of the Lord* is to be prepared," Isa. xl. 4. Faith will remove mountains and make them plains. Christ is our Zerubbabel; mountains of difficulty were in the way of his undertaking, but before him they were all levelled; nothing is too hard for his grace to do.

3. The same hand that has begun this good work will perform it: *He shall bring forth the head-stone* (v. 7); and again (v. 9), *The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house*, be it spoken to his honour (perhaps with his own hands he laid the first stone), and though it has been long retarded, and is still much opposed, yet it shall be finished at last; he shall live to see it finished, nay, and *his hands shall also finish it*; here-in he is a type of Christ, who is both the *author* and the *finisher of our faith*; and his being the *author* of it is an assurance to us that he will be the *finisher*, for, *as for God, his work is perfect*; has he begun and shall he not make an end? Zerubbabel shall himself *bring forth the head-stone with shoutings*, and loud acclamations of joy, among the spectators. The acclamations are not *huzzas*, but *Grace, grace*; that is the burden of the triumphant songs which the church sings. It may be taken, (1.) As magnifying free grace, and giving to that all the glory of what is done. When the work is finished it must be thankfully acknowledged that it was not by any policy or power of our own that it was brought to perfection, but that it was grace that did it—God's good-will towards us and his good work in us and for us. *Grace, grace*, must be cried, not only to the head-stone, but to the foundation-stone, the corner-stone, and indeed to every stone in God's building; from first to last it is no-

thing of works, but all of grace, and all our crowns must be cast at the feet of free grace. *Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us.* (2.) As depending upon free grace, and desiring the continuance of it, for what is yet to be done. *Grace, grace*, is the language of prayer as well as of praise; now that this building is finished, all happiness attend it! Peace be within its walls, and, in order to that, *grace*. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon it! Note, What comes from the grace of God may, in faith, and upon good grounds, be committed to the grace of God, for God will not forsake the work of his own hands.

4. This shall be a full ratification of the prophecies which went before concerning the Jews' return, and their settlement again. When the temple is finished then *thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you*. Note, The exact accomplishment of scripture prophecies is a convincing proof of their divine original. Thus God *confirms the word of his servant*, by saying to Jerusalem, *Thou shalt be built*, Isa. xlv. 26. No word of God shall fall to the ground, nor shall there fail one iota or tittle of it. Zechariah's prophecies of the approaching day of deliverance to the church would soon appear, by the accomplishment of them, to be of God.

5. This shall effectually silence those that looked with contempt upon the beginning of this work, v. 10. Who, where, is he now that despised the day of small things, and thought this work would never come to any thing? The Jews themselves despised the foundation of the second temple, because it was likely to be so far inferior to the first, Ezra iii. 12. Their enemies despised the wall when it was in the building, Neh. ii. 19; iv. 2, 3. But let them not do it. Note, In God's work the day of small things is not to be despised. Though the instruments be weak and unlikely, God often chooses such, by them to bring about great things. As a great mountain becomes a plain before him when he pleases, so a little stone, cut out of a mountain without hands, comes to fill the earth, Dan. ii. 35. Though the beginnings be small, God can make the latter end greatly to increase; a grain of mustard-seed may become a great tree. Let not the dawning light be despised, for it will shine more and more to the perfect day. The day of small things is the day of precious things, and will be the day of great things.

6. This shall abundantly satisfy all the hearty well-wishers to God's interest, who will be glad to see themselves mistaken in *despising the day of small things*. Those that despaired of the finishing of the work shall rejoice when they see *the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel*, when they see him busy among the builders, giving orders and directions what to do, and taking care that the work be done with great exactness, that it may be both fine and firm. Note, It is matter of great rejoicing to all good people



to see magistrates careful and active for the edifying of the house of God, to see the plummet in the hand of those who have power to do much, if they have but a heart according to it; we see not Zerubbabel with the trowel in his hand (that is left to the workmen, the ministers), but we see him with the plummet in his hand, and it is no disparagement, but an honour to him. Magistrates are to inspect ministers' work, and to speak comfortably to the Levites that do their duty.

7. This shall highly magnify the wisdom and care of God's providence, which is always employed for the good of his church. Zerubbabel does his part, does as much as man can do to forward the work, but it is *with those seven, those seven eyes of the Lord* which we read of *ch. iii. 9.* He could do nothing if the watchful, powerful, gracious providence of God did not go before him and go along with him in it. Except the Lord had built this house, Zerubbabel and the rest would have laboured in vain, *Ps. cxxvii. 1.* These *eyes of the Lord* are those that *run to and fro through the whole earth*, that take cognizance of all the creatures and all their actions (*2 Chron. xvi. 9.*), and inspire and direct all, according to the divine counsels. Note, We must not think that God is so taken up with the affairs of his church as to neglect the world; but it is a comfort to us that the same all-wise almighty Providence that governs the nations of the earth is in a particular manner conversant about the church. Those *seven eyes that run through the earth* are all upon the stone that Zerubbabel is laying straight with his plummet, to see that it be well laid. And those that have the plummet in their hand must look up to *those eyes of the Lord*, must have a constant regard to divine Providence, and act in dependence upon its guidance and submission to its disposals.

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What *are* these two olive-trees upon the right *side* of the candlestick and upon the left *side* thereof? 12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What *be* these two olive-branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden *oil* out of themselves? 13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these *be*? And I said, No, my lord. 14 Then said he, These *are* the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

Enough is said to Zechariah to encourage him, and to enable him to encourage others, with reference to the good work of building the temple which they were now about, and that was the principal intention of the vision

he saw; but still he is inquisitive about the particulars, which we will ascribe, not to any vain curiosity, but to the value he had for divine discoveries and the pleasure he took in acquainting himself with them. Those that know much of the things of God cannot but have a humble desire to know more. Now observe,

I. What his enquiry was. He understood the meaning of the candlestick with its lamps: It is Jerusalem, it is the temple, and their salvation that is to *go forth as a lamp that burns*; but he wants to know what are these *two olive-trees* (*v. 11.*), these *two olive-branches*? *v. 12.* Observe here, 1. He asked. Note, Those that would be acquainted with the things of God must be inquisitive concerning those things. Ask, and you shall be told. 2. He asked twice, his first question having no reply given to it. Note, If satisfactory answers be not given to our enquiries and requests quickly, we must renew them, and repeat them, and continue instant and importunate in them, and the vision shall at length *speak, and not lie*. 3. His second query varied somewhat from the former. He first asked, What are *these two olive-trees*, but afterwards, What are *these two olive-branches*? that is, those boughs of the tree that hung over the bowl and distilled oil into it. When we enquire concerning the grace of God, it must be rather as it is communicated to us by the fruitful boughs of the word and ordinances (for that is one of the *things revealed*, which *belong to us and to our children*) than as it is resident in the good olive where all our springs are, for that is one of the *secret things*, which *belong not to us*. 4. In his enquiry he mentioned the observations he had made upon the vision; he took notice not only of what was obvious at first sight, that the two olive-trees grew, one on the right side and the other on the left side of the candlestick (so nigh, so ready, is divine grace to the church), but he observed further, upon a more narrow inspection, that the *two olive-branches*, from which in particular the candlestick did receive of *the root and fatness of the olive* (as the apostle says of the church, *Rom. xi. 17.*), did empty the *golden oil* (that is, the clear bright oil, the best in its kind, and of great value, as if it were *aurum potabile—liquid gold*) out of themselves through the two golden pipes, or (as the margin reads it) which *by the hand of the two golden pipes empty out of themselves oil into the gold*, that is, into the golden bowl on the head of the candlestick. Our Lord Jesus emptied himself, to fill us; his precious blood is the golden oil in which we are supplied with all we need.

II. What answer was given to his enquiry. Now again the angel obliged him expressly to own his ignorance, before he informed him (*v. 13*): "*Knowest thou not what these are?*" If thou knowest the church to be the candlestick, canst thou think the olive-trees,

that supply it with oil, to be any other than the grace of God?" But he owned he either did not fully understand it or was afraid he did not rightly understand it: *I said, No, my Lord, how should I, except some one guide me?* And then he told him (v. 14): *These are the two sons of oil* (so it is in the original), *the two unointed ones* (so we read it), rather, *the two oily ones*. That which we read (Isa. v. 1) *a very fruitful hill* is in the original *the horn of the son of oil*, a fat and fattening soil. 1. If by the candlestick we understand the visible church, particularly that of the Jews at that time, for whose comfort it was primarily intended, these *sons of oil*, that *stand before the Lord of the whole earth*, are the two great ordinances and offices of the magistracy and ministry, at that time lodged in the hands of those two great and good men Zerubbabel and Joshua. Kings and priests were anointed; this prince, this priest, were *oily ones*, endued with the gifts and graces of God's Spirit, to qualify them for the work to which they were called. They *stood before the Lord of the whole earth*, to minister to him, and to receive direction from him; and a great influence they had upon the affairs of the church at that time. Their wisdom, courage, and zeal, were continually emptying themselves into the golden bowl, to keep the lamps burning; and, when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry on the same work; Israel shall no longer be without prince and priest. Good magistrates and good ministers that are themselves anointed with the grace of God and *stand by the Lord of the whole earth*, as faithful adherents to his cause, contribute very much to the maintaining and advancing of religion and the shining forth of the word of life. 2. If by the candlestick we understand the church of the first-born, of true believers, these *sons of oil* may be meant of Christ and the Spirit, the Redeemer and the Comforter. Christ is not only the Messiah, the *Anointed One* himself, but he is the *good olive* to his church; and *from his fulness we receive*, John i. 16. And the Holy Spirit is the *unction* or *anointing* which we have received, 1 John ii. 20, 27. From Christ, the *olive tree*, by the *Spirit, the olive branch*, all the golden oil of grace is communicated to believers, which keeps their lamps burning, and without a constant supply of which they would soon go out. They *stand by the Lord of the whole earth*, who is in a special manner the church's Lord; for the Son was to be sent by the Father, and so was the Holy Ghost, in the time appointed, and they stand by him ready to go.

#### CHAP. V.

Hitherto we have seen visions of peace only, and all the words we have heard have been good words and comfortable words. But the pillar of cloud and fire has a black and dark side towards the Egyptians, as well as a bright and pleasant side towards Israel; so have Zechariah's visions; for God's prophets are not only his ambassadors, to treat of peace with the sons of peace, but heralds, to proclaim war against those that delight in war, and persist in their rebellion. In this chapter we have two visions, by which "the

wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." God will do great and kind things for his people, which the faithful sons of Zion shall rejoice in; but "let the sinners in Zion be afraid!" for, I. God will reckon severely with those particular persons among them that are wicked and profane, and that hated to be reformed in these times of reformation; while God is showing kindness to the body of the nation, and loading that with his blessings, they and their families shall, notwithstanding that, lie under the curse, which the prophet sees in a flying roll, *ver. 1-4*. II. If the body of the nation hereafter degenerate, and wickedness prevail among them, it shall be carried off and hurried away with a swift destruction, under the pressing weight of divine wrath, represented by a talent of lead upon the mouth of an ephah, carried upon the wing I know not where, *ver. 5-11*.

**T**HEN I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. 2 And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. 3 Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off *as* on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off *as* on that side according to it. 4 I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

We do not find that the prophet now needed to be awakened, as he did *ch. iv. 1*. Being awakened then, he kept wakeful after; nay, now he needs not be so much as called to look about him, for of his own accord he *turns and lifts up his eyes*. This good men sometimes get by their infirmities, they make them the more careful and circumspect afterwards. Now observe,

I. What it was that the prophet saw; he looked up into the air, and *behold a flying roll*. A vast large scroll of parchment which had been rolled up, and is therefore called a *roll*, was now unrolled and expanded; this roll was flying upon the wings of the wind, carried swiftly through the air in open view, as an eagle that shoots down upon her prey; it was a *roll*, like Ezekiel's that was *written within and without with lamentations, and mourning, and woe*, Ezek. ii. 9, 10. As the command of the law is in writing, for certainty and perpetuity, so is the *curse of the law*; it *writes bitter things* against the sinner. "What I have written I have written and what is written remains." The angel, to engage the prophet's attention, and to raise in him a desire to have it explained, asks him *what he sees?* And he gives him this account of it: *I see a flying roll*, and as near as he can guess by his eye it is *twenty cubits long* (that is, ten yards) and *ten cubits broad*, that is,



five yards. The scriptures of the Old Testament and the New are *rolls*, in which God has *written to us the great things of his law and gospel*. Christ is the Master of the rolls. They are large rolls, have much in them. They are *flying rolls*; the angel that had the *everlasting gospel to preach flew in the midst of heaven*, Rev. xiv. 6. God's word runs *very swiftly*, Ps. cxlvii. 15. Those that would be let into the meaning of these rolls must first tell what they see, must go as far as they can themselves. "*What is written in the law? how readeest thou? Tell me that, and then thou shalt be made to understand what thou readeest.*"

II. How it was expounded to him, v. 3, 4. This flying roll is a *curse*; it contains a declaration of the righteous wrath of God against those sinners especially who by swearing affront God's majesty or by stealing invade their neighbour's property. Let every Israelite rejoice in the blessings of his country with trembling; for if he swear, if he steal, if he live in any course of sin, he shall see them with his eyes, but shall not have the comfort of them, for against him the curse has gone forth. *If I be wicked, woe to me for all this. Now observe here,*

1. The extent of this curse; the prophet sees it flying, but which way does it steer its course? It *goes forth over the face of the whole earth*, not only of the land of Israel, but the *whole world*; for those that have sinned against the *law written in their hearts* only shall by that law be judged, though they have not the book of the law. Note. All mankind are liable to the judgment of God; and, wherever sinners are, any where upon the face of the whole earth, the curse of God can and will find them out and seize them. Oh that we could with an eye of faith see the flying roll of God's curse hanging over the guilty world as a thick cloud, not only keeping off the sun-beams of God's favour from them, but big with thunders, lightnings, and storms, ready to destroy them! How welcome then would the tidings of a Saviour be, who came to *redeem us from the curse of the law* by being himself *made a curse for us*, and, like the prophet, *eating this roll*! The vast length and breadth of this roll intimate what a multitude of curses sinners lie exposed to. God will make their plagues wonderful, if *they turn not*.

2. The criminals against whom particularly this curse is levelled. The world is full of sin in great variety: so was the Jewish church at this time. But two sorts of sinners are here specified as the objects of this curse:—(1.) *Thieves*; it is *for every one that steals*, that by fraud or force takes that which is not his own, especially that robs God and converts to his own use what was devoted to God and his honour, which was a sin much complained of among the Jews at this time, Mal. iii. 8; Neh. xiii. 10. Sacrilege is, without doubt,

the worst kind of thievery. He also that *robs his father or mother*, and *saith, It is no transgression* (Prov. xxviii. 24), let him know that against him this curse is directed, for it is against *every one that steals*. The letter of the eighth commandment has no penalty annexed to it; but the curse here is a sanction to that command. (2.) *Swearers*. Sinners of the former class offend against the second table, these against the first; for the curse meets those that break either table. He that swears rashly and profanely shall not be held guiltless, much less he that swears falsely (v. 4); he imprecates the curse upon himself by his perjury, and so shall his doom be; God will say *Amen* to his imprecation, and turn it upon his own head. He has appealed to God's judgment, which is always according to truth, for the confirming of a lie, and to that judgment he shall go which he has so impiously affronted.

3. The enforcing of this curse, and the equity of it: *I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts*, v. 4. He that pronounces the sentence will take care to see it executed. His bringing it forth denotes, (1.) His giving it commission. It is a righteous curse, for he is a righteous God that warrants it. (2.) His giving it the setting on. He brings it forth with power, and orders what execution it shall do; and who can put by or resist the curse which a God of almighty power brings forth?

4. The effect of this curse; it is very dreadful, (1.) Upon the sinner himself: *Every one that steals shall be cut off*, not corrected, but destroyed, cut off from the land of the living. The curse of God is a cutting thing, a killing thing. He shall be cut off *as on this side* (cut off from this place, that is, from Jerusalem), and so he that swears from *this side* (it is the same word), from this place. God will not spare the sinners he finds among his own people, nor shall the holy city be a protection to the unholy. Or they shall be cut off *from hence*, that is, from the face of the whole earth, over which the curse flies. Or he that steals shall be *cut off on this side*, and he that swears *on that side*; they shall all be cut off, one as well as another, and both according to the curse, for the judgments of God's hand are exactly agreeable with the judgments of his mouth. (2.) Upon his family: *It shall enter into the house of the thief and of him that swears*. God's curse comes with a warrant to break open doors, and cannot be kept out by bars or locks. There where the sinner is most secure, and thinks himself out of danger,—there where he promises himself refreshment by food and sleep,—there, in his own house, shall the curse of God seize him; nay, it shall fall not upon him only, but upon all about him for his sake. *Cursed shall be his basket and his store, and cursed the fruit of his body*, Deut. xxviii. 17, 18. *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked*, Prov. iii. 33.

It shall not only beset his house, or be at the door, but *it shall remain in the midst of his house*, and diffuse its malignant influences to all the parts of it. *It shall dwell in his tabernacle because it is none of his.* Job xviii.

15. It shall dwell where he dwells, and be his constant companion at bed and board, to make both miserable to him. Having got possession, it shall keep it, and, unless he repent and reform, there is no way to throw it out or cut off the entail of it. Nay, it shall so remain in it as to *consume it with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof*, which, though ever so strong, though the timber be heart of oak and the stones hevn out of the rocks of adamant, yet they shall not be able to stand before the curse of God. We heard the stone and the timber complaining of the owner's extortion and oppression, and groaning under the burden of them, Hab. ii. 11. Now here we have them delivered *from that bondage of corruption*. While they were in their strength and beauty they supported, sorely against their will, the sinner's pride and security; but, when they are consumed, their ruins will, to their satisfaction, be standing monuments of God's justice and lasting witnesses of the sinner's injustice. Note, Sin is the ruin of houses and families, especially the sins of injury and perjury. *Who knows the power of God's anger*, and the operations of his curse? Even timber and stones have been consumed by them; let us therefore stand in awe and not sin.

5 Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what *is* this that goeth forth. 6 And I said, What *is* it? And he said, This *is* an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This *is* their resemblance through all the earth. 7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this *is* a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. 8 And he said, This *is* wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. 9 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind *was* in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. 10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? 11 And he said unto me, To build it a house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be esta-

blished, and set there upon her own base.

The foregoing vision was very plain and easy, but in this are things *dark and hard to be understood*; and some think that the scope of it is to foretel the final destruction of the Jewish church and nation and the dispersion of the Jews, when, by crucifying Christ and persecuting his gospel, they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities; therefore it is industriously set out in obscure figures and expressions, "lest the plain denunciation of the second overthrow of temple and state might discourage them too much from going forward in the present restoration of both." So Mr. Pemble.

The prophet was contemplating the power and terror of the curse which consumes the houses of thieves and swearers, when he was told to turn and he should see greater desolations than these made by the curse of God for the sin of man: *Lift up thy eyes now*, and see what is here, v. 5. *What is this that goeth forth?* Whether over the face of the whole earth, as the flying roll (v. 3), or only over Jerusalem, is not certain. But, it seems, the prophet now, through either the distance or the dimness of his sight, could not well tell what it was, but asked, *What is it?* v. 6. And the angel tells him both what it is and what it means.

I. He sees an *ephah*, a measure wherewith they measured corn; it contained *ten omers* (Exod. xvi. 36) and was the tenth part of a *homer* (Ezek. xlv. 11); it is put for any measure used in commerce, Deut. xxv. 14. And *this is their resemblance*, the resemblance of the Jewish nation *over all the earth*, wherever they are now dispersed, or at least it will be so when their ruin draws near. They are filling up the measure of their iniquity, which God has set them; and when it is full, as the ephah of corn, they shall be delivered into the hands of those to whom God has sold them for their sins; they are *meted* to destruction, as an ephah of corn measured to the market or to the mill. And some think that the mentioning of an ephah, which is used in buying and selling, intimates that fraud, and deceit, and extortion in commerce, were sins abounding much among them, as that people are known to be notoriously guilty of them at this day. This is a proper representation of them *through all the earth*. There is a measure set them, and they are filling it up apace. See Matt. xxiii. 32; 1 Thess. ii. 16.

II. He sees a *woman sitting in the midst of the ephah*, representing the sinful church and nation of the Jews in their latter and degenerate age, when *the faithful city became a harlot*. He that weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance measures nations and churches as in an ephah; so exact is he in his judicial dealings with them. God's people are called *the corn*



of his floor, Isa. xxi. 10. And here he puts this corn into the bushel, in order to his parting with it. The angel says of the woman in the *ephah*, *This is wickedness*; it is a wicked nation, else God would not have rejected it thus; it is as wicked as *wickedness* itself, it is abominably wicked. *How has the gold become dim! Israel was holiness to the Lord* (Jer. ii. 3); but now *this is wickedness*, and wickedness is nowhere so scandalous, so odious, and, in many instances, so outrageous, as when it is found among professors of religion.

III. He sees the woman thrust down into the *ephah*, and a *talent*, or large weight, of *lead*, cast upon the *mouth* of it, by which she is secured, and made a close prisoner in the *ephah*, and utterly disabled to get out of it. This is designed to show that the wrath of God against impenitent sinners is, 1. Unavoidable, and what they cannot escape; they are bound over to it, concluded under sin, and shut up under the curse, as this woman in the *ephah*; *he would fain flee out of his hand* (Job xxvii. 22), but he cannot. 2. It is insupportable, and what they cannot bear up under. Guilt is upon the sinner as a talent of lead, to sink him to the lowest hell. When Christ said of the things of Jerusalem's peace, *Now they are hidden from thy eyes*, that threw a talent of lead upon them.

IV. He sees the *ephah*, with the woman thus pressed to death in it, carried away into some far country. 1. The instruments employed to do it were *two women*, who had *wings like those of a stork*, large and strong, and, to make them fly the more swiftly, they had the *wind in their wings*, denoting the great violence and expedition with which the Romans destroyed the Jewish nation. God has not only winged messengers in heaven, but he can, when he pleases, give wings to those also whom he employs in this lower world; and, when he does so, he forwards them with the wind in their wings; his providence carries them on with a favourable gale. 2. They bore it up in the air, denoting the terrors which pursued the wicked Jews, and their being a public example of God's vengeance to the world. *They lifted it up between the earth and the heaven*, as unworthy of either and abandoned by both; for the Jews, when this was fulfilled, *pleased not God and were contrary to all men*, 1 Thess. ii. 15. *This is wickedness*, and this comes of it; heaven thrust out wicked angels, and earth spewed out wicked Canaanites. 3. When the prophet enquired whither they carried their prisoner whom they had now in execution (v. 10) he was told that they designed *to build it a house in the land of Shinar*. This intimates that the punishment of the Jews should be a final dispersion; they should be hurried out of their own country, *as the chaff which the wind drives away*, and should be forced to dwell in far countries, particularly in the country of Babylon,

whither many of the scattered Jews went, after the destruction of their country by the Romans, as they did also to other countries, especially in the Levant parts, not to sojourn, as in their former captivity, for seventy years, but to be nailed down for perpetuity. *The ephah shall be established, and set upon her own base*. This intimates, (1.) That their calamity shall continue from generation to generation, and that they shall be so dispersed that they shall never unite or incorporate again; they shall settle in a perpetual unsettlement, and Cain's doom shall be theirs, to dwell in the land of shaking. (2.) That their iniquity shall continue too, and their hearts shall be hardened in it. *Blindness has happened unto Israel*, and they are settled upon the lees of their own unbelief; their wickedness is established upon its own basis. God has given them a *spirit of slumber* (Rom. xi. 8), *lest at any time they should convert, and be healed*.

## CHAP. VI.

The two kingdoms of providence and grace are what we are all very nearly interested in, and therefore are concerned to acquaint ourselves with, all our temporal affairs being in a necessary subjection to divine Providence, and all our spiritual and eternal concerns in a necessary dependence upon divine grace; and these two are represented to us in this chapter—the former by a vision, the latter by a type. Here is, I. God, as King of nations, ruling the world by the ministry of angels, in the vision of the four chariots, ver. 1–8. II. God, as King of saints, ruling the church by the mediation of Christ, in the figure of Joshua the high priest crowned, the ceremony performed, and then explained concerning Christ, ver. 9–15.

AND I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains *were* mountains of brass. 2 In the first chariot *were* red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; 3 And in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grised and bay horses. 4 Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, *What are these*, my lord? 5 And the angel answered and said unto me, *These are the four spirits of the heavens*, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The black horses which *are* therein go forth into the north country; and the white go forth after them; and the grised go forth toward the south country. 7 And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, *Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth*. So they walked to and fro through the earth. 8 Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying, *Behold, these that go toward the*

north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.

The prophet is forward to receive this vision, and, as if he expected it, he *turned and lifted up his eyes and looked*. Though this was the seventh vision he had had, yet he did not think he had had enough; for the more we know of God and his will, if we know it aright, the more desirous we shall be to get a further acquaintance with God. Now observe here the sight that the prophet had of *four chariots* drawn by horses of divers colours, together with the explication of the sight, v. 1—5. He did not look long before he discovered that which was worth seeing, and which would serve very much for the encouraging of himself and his friends in this dark day. We are very much in the dark concerning the meaning of this vision. Some by the *four chariots* understand the four monarchies; and then they read (v. 5), *These are the four winds of the heavens*, and suppose that therein reference is had to Dan. vii. 2, where Daniel saw, in vision, the *four winds of the heavens striving upon the great sea*, representing the four monarchies. The Babylonian monarchy, they think, is here represented by the *red horses*, which are not afterwards mentioned, because that monarchy was now extinct. The second chariot with the *black horses* is the Persian monarchy, which went forth northward against the Babylonians, and *quieted God's Spirit in the north country*, by executing his judgments on Babylon and freeing the Jews from their captivity. The *white*, the Grecians, go forth after them in the north, for they overthrow the Persians. The *grizzled*, the Romans, who conquered the Grecian empire, are said to go forth towards the south country, because Egypt, which lay southward, was the last branch of the Grecian empire that was subdued by the Romans. The *bay horses* had been with the *grizzled*, but afterwards went forth by themselves; and by these they understand the Goths and Vandals, who with their victorious arms walked to and fro through the earth, or the Seleucidæ and Lagidæ, the two branches of the Grecian empire. Thus Grotius and others.

But I incline rather to understand this vision more generally, as designing to represent the administration of the kingdom of Providence in the government of this lower world. The *angels* are often called the *chariots of God*, as Ps. lxxviii. 17; xlviii. 10. The various providences of God concerning nations and churches are represented by the different colours of horses, Rev. vi. 2, 4, 5, 8. And so we may observe here, 1. That the counsels and decrees of God are the spring and original of all events, and they are immovable, as *mountains of brass*. The *chariots* came from between the two mountains; for God performs the thing that is ap-

pointed for us: his appointments are the originals, and his performances are but copies from them; he does all according to the counsel of his will. We could as soon grasp the mountains in our arms as comprehend the divine counsels in our finite understandings, and as soon remove mountains of brass as alter any of God's purposes; for he is in one mind, and who can turn him? Whatever the providences of God are concerning us, as to public or private affairs, we should see them all coming from between the mountains of brass, and therefore see it as much our folly to quarrel with them as it is our duty to acquiesce in them. Who may say to God, *What doest thou, or why doest thou so?* Acts ii. 23; iv. 28. 2. That God executes his decrees in the works of Providence, which are as chariots, in which he rides as a prince in an open chariot, to show his glory to the world, in which, as in chariots of war, he rides forth conquering and to conquer, and triumphing over all the enemies of his glory and government. God is great and terrible in his doings (Ps. lxxvi. 3), and in them we see the goings of our God, our King, Ps. lxxviii. 24. His providences move swiftly and strongly as chariots, but all directed and governed by his infinite wisdom and sovereign will, as chariots by their drivers. 3. That the holy angels are the ministers of God's providence, and are employed by him, as the armies of heaven, for the executing of his counsels among the inhabitants of the earth; they are the chariots, or, which comes all to one, they are the horses that draw the chariots, great in power and might, and who, like the horse that God himself describes (Job xxxix. 19, &c.), are clothed with thunder, are terrible, but cannot be terrified nor made afraid; they are chariots of fire, and horses of fire, to carry one prophet to heaven and guard another on earth. They are as observant of and obsequious to the will of God as well-managed horses are to their rider or driver. Not that God needs them or their services, but he is pleased to make use of them, that he may put honour upon them, and encourage our trust in his providence. 4. That the events of Providence have different aspects and the face of the times often changes. The horses in the first chariot were red, signifying war and bloodshed, blood to the horse-bridles, Rev. xiv. 20. Those in the second chariot were black, signifying the dismal melancholy consequences of war; it puts all into mourning, lays all waste, introduces famines, and pestilences, and desolations, and makes whole lands to languish. Those in the third chariot were white, signifying the return of comfort, and peace, and prosperity, after these dark and dismal times: though God cause grief to the children or men, yet will he have compassion. Those in the fourth chariot were of a mixed colour, grizzled and bay; some speckled and spotted, and ash-coloured, signifying events of differ-



ent complexions interwoven and counter-changed, a day of prosperity and a day of adversity set *the one over-against the other*. The cup of Providence in the hand of the Lord is *full of mixture*, Ps. lxxv. 8. 5. That all the instruments of Providence, and all the events of it, come from God, and from him they receive their commissions and instructions (v. 5): *These are the four spirits of heaven, the four winds* (so some), which seem to blow as they list, from the various points of the compass; but God has them *in his fists* and brings them out of *his treasures*. Or, rather, *These are the angels that go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth*, to attend upon him and minister to him, to behold his glory in the upper world, which is their blessedness, and to serve his glory in this lower world, which is their business. They *stand before him* as the *Lord of the whole earth*, to receive orders from him and give up their accounts to him concerning their services on this earth, for it is all within his jurisdiction. But, when he appoints, they *go forth* as messengers of his counsels and ministers of his justice and mercy. Those secret motions and impulses upon the spirits of men by which the designs of Providence are carried on, some think, are these *four spirits of the heavens*, which *go forth from God* and fulfil what he appoints, who is *the God of the spirits of all flesh*. 6. That there is an admirable beauty in Providence, and one event serves for a balance to another (v. 6): *The black horses went forth*, carrying with them very dark and melancholy events, such as made every person and every thing look black; but presently the *white went forth after them*, carrying joy to those that mourned, and, by a new turn given to affairs, making them to look pleasant again. Such are God's dealings with his church and people: if the black horses go forth, the white ones presently go after them; for *as affliction abounds consolation much more abounds*. 7. That the common general aspect of providence is mixed and compounded. The *grizzled and bay horses* were both in the *fourth chariot* (v. 3), and though they went forth, at first, towards the *south country*, yet afterwards they *sought to walk to and fro through the earth* and were directed to do so, v. 7. If we go to and fro through the earth, we shall find the events of Providence neither all black nor all white, but ash-coloured, or gray, mixed of black and white. Such is the world we live in; that before us is un-mixed. Here we are singing, at the same time, of *mercy and judgment*, and we must *sing unto God* of both (Ps. ci. 1) and labour to accommodate ourselves to God's will and design in the mixtures of Providence, rejoicing in our comforts as though we rejoiced not, because they have their allays, and weeping for our afflictions as though we wept not, because there is so much mercy mixed with them. 8. That God is well-pleased with all

the operations of his own providence (v. 8): *These have quieted my spirit*, these *black horses* which denote extraordinary judgments, and the *white* ones which denote extraordinary deliverances, both which *went towards the north country*, while the common mixed providences went all the world over. These have *quieted my spirit in the north-country*, which had of late been the most remarkable scene of action with reference to the church; that is, by these uncommon appearances and actings of providence God's wrath is executed upon the enemies of the church, and his favours are conferred upon the church, both which had long been deferred, and in both God had fulfilled his will, accomplished his word, and so *quieted his Spirit*. *The Lord is well-pleased for his righteousness' sake*; and, as he speaks, Isa. i. 24, made himself easy.

9 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 10 Take of *them* of the captivity, *even* of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah, which are come from Babylon, and come thou the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah; 11 Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set *them* upon the head of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest; 12 And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is *The BRANCH*; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: 13 Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. 14 And the crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD. 15 And they *that are* far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And *this* shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.

God did not only at *sundry times*, but in *divers manners*, speak in time past by the prophets to his church. In the former part of this chapter he spoke by a vision, which only the prophet himself saw; here, in this latter part, he speaks by a sign, or type, which many saw, and which, as it was explained, was an illustrious prediction of the Messiah as the priest and king of his church. Here is,

I. The significant ceremony which God appointed, and that was the *coronation of Joshua* the high priest, v. 10, 11. It is observable that there should be two eminent types of Christ in the Old Testament that were both named *Joshua* (the same name with *Jesus*, and by the LXX., and in the New Testament, rendered *Jesus*, Acts vii. 45)—Joshua the chief captain, a type of Christ the captain of our salvation, and Joshua the chief priest, a type of Christ the high priest of our profession, and both in their day saviours and leaders into Canaan. And this is peculiar to Joshua the high priest, that here was something done to him by the divine appointment on purpose that he might be a type of Christ, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest. Joshua was far from being ambitious of a crown, and the people of having a crowned head over them; but the prophet, to the great surprise of both, is ordered to crown Joshua as if he had been a king. And, as Zerubbabel's prudence and piety kept this from being any affront to him (as the setting up of a rival with him), so God's providence kept the kings of Persia from taking umbrage at it, as raising a rebellion against them. In doing what we are sure is God's pleasure, as this was, we may well venture men's displeasure. 1. Here were some Jews come from Babylon that brought an offering to the house of God, *some of the captivity*, here named to their honour, that *came from Babylon* on a visit to Jerusalem. They ought to have bidden a final farewell to Babylon, and to have come and settled with their brethren in their own land, and for their remissness and indifference in not doing so they thought to atone by this visit. Perhaps they came as ambassadors from the body of the Jews that were in Babylon, who lived there in ease and fulness; and, hearing that the building of the temple went on slowly for want of money, they sent them with an offering of gold and silver for the service of the house of God. Note, Those that by reason of distance, or otherwise, cannot forward a good work by their persons, must, as they are able, forward it by their purses; if some find hands, let others fill them. 2. Time and place are appointed for the prophet to meet them. They thought to bring their present to the priest, God's ordinary minister; but God has a prophet, an extraordinary one, ready to receive them and it, which would be an encouragement to them, who, in their captivity, had so often complained, *We see not our signs, there is no more any prophet*, and would invite them and others to re-settle in their own land, which then began to look like itself, like a holy land, when the Spirit of prophecy was revived in it. Zechariah was ordered to give them the meeting the *same day* they came (for when they had arrived they would lose no time, but present their offering immedi-

ately), and to bid them welcome, assuring them that God now accepted their gifts. He was to meet them in the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah, who probably was receiver-general for the temple, and kept the treasures of it. They brought their gold and silver, to be employed about the temple, but God ordered it to be used in honour of One *greater than the temple*, Matt. xii. 6. 3. Crowns are to be made, and put upon the head of Joshua, v. 11. It is supposed that there were two crowns provided, one of silver and the other of gold; the former (as some think) denoting his priestly dignity, the latter his kingly dignity. Or, rather, he being a priest already, and having a crown of gold, of pure gold, already, to signify his honour and power as a priest, these crowns of silver and gold both signify the *royal dignity*, the crown of silver being perhaps designed to typify the kingdom of the Messiah when he was here on earth, for then he was the *King of Israel* (John i. 49), but the crown of gold his kingdom in his exalted state, the glory of which as far exceeded that of the former as gold does silver. The sun shines as gold, when he *goes forth in his strength*; and the beams of the moon, when she *walks in brightness*, we call *silver beams*. Those that had worshipped the sun and moon shall now fall down before the golden and silver crowns of the exalted Redeemer, before whom the sun shall be ashamed and the moon confounded, being both out-shone.

II. The signification which God gave of this ceremony. Every one would be ready to ask, "What is the meaning of Joshua's being crowned thus?" And the prophet is as ready to tell them the meaning of it. Upon this speaking sign is grafted a prediction, and the sign was used to make it the more taken notice of and the better remembered. Now the promise is,

1. That God will, in the fulness of time, raise up a great high priest, like Joshua. Tell Joshua that he is but the figure of one that is to come, a faint shadow of him (v. 12): *Speak unto him in the name of the Lord of hosts, that the man whose name is The BRANCH shall grow up out of his place, out of Bethlehem the city of David, the place appointed for his birth; though the family be a root in a dry ground, yet this branch shall spring out of it, as in the spring, when the sun returns, the flowers spring out of the roots, in which they lay buried out of sight and out of mind. He shall grow up for himself* (so some read it) *propria virtute*—*by his own vital energy*, shall be exalted *in his own strength*.

2. That, as Joshua was an active useful instrument in building the temple, so the man, the branch, shall be the master-builder, the sole builder of the spiritual temple, the gospel-church. He shall build the temple of the Lord; and it is repeated (v. 13), *Even*



he shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall grow up to do good, to be an instrument of God's glory and a great blessing to mankind. Note, The gospel-church is the temple of the Lord, a spiritual house (1 Pet. ii. 5), a holy temple, Eph. ii. 21. In the temple God made discoveries of himself to his people, and there he received the service and homage of his people; so, in the gospel-church, the light of divine revelation shines by the word, and the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise are offered. Now Christ is not only the foundation, but the founder, of this temple, by his Spirit and grace.

3. That Christ shall bear the glory. Glory is a burden, but not too heavy for him to bear who upholds all things. The cross was his glory, and he bore that; so was the crown an exceeding weight of glory, and he bears that. The government is upon his shoulders, and in it he bears the glory, Isa. ix. 6. They shall hang upon him all the glory of his Father's house, Isa. xxii. 24. It becomes him, and he is *par negotio*—well able to bear it. The glory of the priesthood and royalty had been divided between the house of Aaron and that of David; but now he alone shall bear all the glory of both. That which he shall bear, which he shall undertake, shall be indeed the glory of Israel; and they must wait for that, and, in prospect of it, must be content in the want of that external glory which they formerly had. He shall bear such a glory as shall make the glory of this latter house greater than that of the former. He shall lift up the glory (so it may be read); the glory of Israel had been thrown down and depressed, but he shall raise it out of the dust.

4. That he shall have a throne, and be both priest and king upon his throne. A throne denotes both dignity and dominion, an exalted honour with an extensive power. (1.) This priest shall be a king, and his office as a priest shall be no diminution to his dignity as a king: *He shall sit and rule upon his throne*. Christ, as a priest, ever lives to make intercession for us; but he does it sitting at his Father's right hand, as one having authority, Heb. viii. 1. We have such a high priest as Israel never had, for he is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, which puts a prevailing virtue into his mediation; he that appears for us within the veil is one that sits and rules there. Christ, who is ordained to offer sacrifices for us, is authorized to give law to us. He will not save us unless we be willing that he should govern us. God has prepared him a throne in the heavens; and, if we would have any benefit by that, we must prepare him a throne in our hearts, and be willing and glad that he should sit and rule upon that throne; and to him every thought within us must be brought into obedience. (2.) This king shall be a priest, a priest upon his throne. With the majesty and

power of a king, he shall have the tenderness and simplicity of a priest, who, being taken from among men, is ordained for men, and can have compassion on the ignorant, Heb. v. 1, 2. In all the acts of his government as a king he prosecutes the intentions of his grace as a priest. Let not therefore those that are his look upon his throne, though a throne of glory and a throne of judgment, with terror and amazement; for, as there is a rainbow about the throne, so he is a priest upon the throne.

5. That the counsel of peace shall be between them both. That is, (1.) Between Jehovah and the man the branch, between the Father and the Son; the counsels concerning the peace to be made between God and man, by the mediation of Christ, shall be concerted (that is, shall appear to have been concerted) by Infinite Wisdom in the covenant of redemption; the Father and the Son understood one another perfectly well in that matter. Or, rather, (2.) Between the priest and the throne, between the priestly and kingly office of Jesus Christ. The man the branch must grow up to carry on a counsel of peace, peace on earth, and, in order to that, peace with heaven. God's thoughts towards us were thoughts of peace, and, in prosecution of them, he exalted his Son Christ Jesus to be both a prince and a Saviour; he gave him a throne, but with this proviso, that he should be a priest upon his throne, and by executing the two offices of a priest and king should bring about that great undertaking of man's reconciliation to God and happiness in God. Some think it alludes to the former government of the Jews' state, wherein the king and priest, separate officers, did take counsel one with another, for the maintenance of peace and prosperity in church and state, as did Zerubbabel and Joshua now. I may add, the prophets of God helping them. So shall the peace and welfare of the gospel-church, and of all believers, be wrought, though not by two separate persons, yet by virtue of two separate offices meeting in one—Christ purchasing all peace by his priesthood and maintaining and defending it by his kingdom; so Mr. Pemble. And his prophetic office is serviceable to both in this great design.

6. That there shall be a happy coalition between Jews and Gentiles in the gospel-church, and they shall both meet in Christ, the priest upon his throne, as the centre of their unity (v. 15): *Those that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord*. Some understand it of the Jews that were now afar off in Babylon, that staid behind in captivity, to the great discouragement of their brethren that had returned, who wanted their help in building the temple. Now God promises that many of them, and some of other nations too, proselyted to the Jewish religion, should come in, and lend a helping hand to the building of the temple, and many hands would make light work. The

kings of Persia contributed to the building of the temple (Ezra vi. 8) and the furnishing of it, Ezra vii. 19, 20. And, in after-times, Herod the Great, and others that were strangers, helped to beautify and enrich the temple. But it has a further reference to that temple of the Lord which the man the branch was to build. The Gentiles, *strangers afar off*, shall help to build it, for from among them God will raise up ministers that shall be workers together with Christ about that building; and all the Gentile converts shall be stones added to this building, so that it shall *grow up to a holy temple*, Eph. ii. 20—22. When God's temple is to be built he can fetch in those that are afar off and employ them in the building of it.

7. That the accomplishment of this will be a strong confirmation of the truth of God's word: *You shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you.* That promise, that those that were afar off should come and assist them in *building the temple of the Lord*, was as it were the *giving of them a sign*; by this they might be assured that the other promises should be fulfilled in due time. This should be fulfilled now very speedily; it was so, for those that had been their enemies and accusers, in obedience to the king's edict, became their helpers and did speedily what they were ordered to do for the furtherance of the work, and by that means the work went on and was finished; see Ezra vi. 13, 14. Now, by this surprising assistance which they had from afar off in building the temple, they might know that Zechariah, who told them of it before, was sent of God, and that therefore his word concerning the man the branch should be fulfilled.

8. That these promises were strong obligations to obedience: "*For this shall come to pass (you shall have help in building the temple) if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God.* You shall have the help of foreigners in building the temple, if you will but set about it in good earnest yourselves." The assistance of others, instead of being an excuse for our slothfulness, should be a spur to our industry. "You shall have the benefit and comfort of all those promises if you make conscience of your duty." They must know that they are upon their good behaviour; and, though their God is coming towards them in a way of mercy, they cannot expect him to proceed in it unless they conform to his laws. Note, That which God requires of us, to qualify us for his favour, is obedience to his revealed will; and it must be a diligent obedience. We cannot *obey the voice of God* without a great deal of care and pains, nor will our obedience be accepted of God unless it be laboured by us.

III. The provision that was made to preserve the remembrance of this. *The crowns* that were used in this solemnity were not

given to Joshua, but must be kept for a memorial in the temple of the Lord, v. 14. Either they were laid up in the temple treasury or (as the Jews' tradition is) they were hung up in the windows of the temple, in the view of all, in *perpetuam rei memoriam*—for a perpetual memorial, for a traditional evidence of the promise of the Messiah and this typical transaction used for the confirmation of that promise. The crowns were delivered to those who found the materials (and some think their names were engraven on the crowns), to be preserved as a public testimony of their pious liberality and an encouragement to others in like manner to bring presents to the house of God. Note, Various means were used for the support of the faith of the Old-Testament saints, who waited for the consolation of Israel, till the time, the set time, for it came.

## CHAP. VII.

We have done with the visions, but not with the revelations of this book; the prophet sees no more such signs as he had seen, but still "the word of the Lord came to him." In this chapter we have, I. A case of conscience proposed to the prophet by the children of the captivity concerning fasting, whether they should continue their solemn fasts which they had religiously observed during the seventy years of their captivity, ver. 1—3. II. The answer to this question, which is given in this and the next chapter; and this answer was given, not all at once, but by piece-meal, and, it should seem, at several times, for here are four distinct discourses which have all of them reference to this case, each of them prefaced with "the word of the Lord came," in this chapter, ver. 4—8, and ch. viii. 1, 15. The method of them is very observable. In this chapter, 1. The prophet sharply reproves them for the mismanagements of their fasts, ver. 4—7. 2. He exhorts them to reform their lives, which would be the best way of fasting, and to take heed of those sins which brought those judgments upon them which they kept these fasts in memory of, ver. 8—14. And then in the next chapter, having searched the wound, he binds it up, and heals it, with gracious assurances of great mercy God had yet in store for them, by which he would turn their fasts into feasts.

AND it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, *even* in Chisleu; 2 When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regem-melech, and their men, to pray before the Lord, 3 And to speak unto the priests which *were* in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? 4 Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, 5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, *even* those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even* to me? 6 And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? 7 Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former



prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain?

This occasional sermon, which the prophet preached, and which is recorded in this and the next chapter, was above two years after the former, in which he gave them an account of his visions, as appears by comparing the date of this (v. 1), in the *ninth month* of the *fourth year* of Darius, with the date of that (ch. i. 1), in the *eighth month* of the second year of Darius; not that Zechariah was idle all that while (it is expressly said that he and Haggai continued *prophesying* till the temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius; Ezra vi. 14, 15), but during that time he did not preach any sermon that was afterwards published, and left upon record, as this is. God may be honoured, his work done, and his interest served, by word of mouth as well as by writing; and by inculcating and pressing what has been taught, as well as by advancing something new. Now here we have,

I. A case proposed concerning fasting. Some persons were sent to enquire of the priests and prophets whether they should continue to observe their yearly fasts, particularly that in the fifth month, as they had done. It is uncertain whether the case was put by those that yet remained in Babylon, who, being deprived of the benefit of the solemn feasts which God's ordinance appointed them, made up the want by the solemn fasts which God's providences called them to; or by those that had returned, but lived in the country, as some rather incline to think, because they are called the *people of the land*, v. 5. But, as to that, the answer given to the messengers of the captive Jews might be directed, not to them only, but to *all the people*. Observe,

1. Who they were that came with this enquiry—*Sherazer* and *Rogem-melech*, persons of some rank and figure, for they came *with their men*, and did not think it below them, or any disparagement to them, to be sent on this errand, but rather an addition to their honour to be, (1.) Attendants in God's house, there to do duty and receive orders. The greatest of men are less than the least of the ordinances of Jesus Christ. (2.) Agents for God's people, to negotiate their affairs. Men of estates, having more leisure than men of business, ought to employ their time in the service of the public, and by doing good they make themselves truly great; the *messengers of the churches* were the *glory of Christ*, 2 Cor. viii. 23.

2. What the errand was upon which they came. They were sent perhaps not with *gold and silver* (as those, ch. vi. 10, 11), or, if they were, that is not mentioned, but upon the two great errands which should bring us all to the house of God, (1.) to intercede

with God for his mercy. They were sent to *pray before the Lord*, and, some think (according to the usage then), to *offer sacrifice*, with which they offered up their prayers. The Jews, in captivity, prayed towards the temple (as appears Dan. vi. 10); but now that it was in a fair way to be rebuilt they sent their representatives to pray in it, remembering that God had said that his house should be called a *house of prayer for all people*, Isa. lvi. 7. In prayer we must set ourselves as *before the Lord*, must see his eye upon us and have our eye up to him. (2.) To enquire of God concerning his mind. Note, When we offer up our requests to God it must be with a readiness to receive instructions from him; for, if we turn away our ear from hearing his law, we cannot expect that our prayers should be acceptable to him. We must therefore desire to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life *that we may enquire there* (Ps. xxvii. 4), asking, not only, Lord, what wilt thou do for me? but, Lord, *what wilt thou have me to do?*

3. Whom they consulted. They spoke to the *priests that were in the house of the Lord and to the prophets*; the former were an oracle for ordinary cases, the latter for extraordinary; they were blessed with both, and would try if either could acquaint them with the mind of God in this case. Note, God having given diversities of gifts to men, and all to profit with, we should make use of all as there is occasion. They were not so wedded to the priests, their stated ministers, as to distrust the prophets, who appeared, by the gifts given them, well qualified to serve the church; nor yet were they so much enamoured with the prophets as to despise the priests, but they spoke both to the priests and to the prophets, and, in consulting both, gave glory to the God of Israel, and that one Spirit who *works all in all*. God might speak to them either by *urim* or by *prophets* (1 Sam. xxviii. 6), and therefore they would not neglect either. The priests and the prophets were not jealous one of another, nor had any difference among themselves; let not the people then make differences between them, but thank God they had both. The prophets did indeed reprove what was amiss in the priests, but at the same time told the people that the *priest's lips should keep knowledge*, and they must *enquire the law at his mouth*, for he is the *messenger of the Lord of hosts*, Mal. ii. 7. Note, Those that would know God's mind should consult God's ministers, and in doubtful cases ask advice of those whose special business it is to *search the scriptures*.

4. What the case was which they desired satisfaction in (v. 3): *Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years*. Observe, (1.) What had been their past practice, not only during the seventy years of the captivity, but to this

time, which was twenty years after the liberty proclaimed them; they kept up solemn stated fasts for humiliation and prayer, which they religiously observed, according as their opportunities were, in their closets, families, or such assemblies for worship as they had. In the case here, they mention only one, that of the fifth month; but it appears, by *ch. viii. 19*, that they observed four anniversary fasts, one in the fourth month (*June 17*), in remembrance of the breaking up of the wall of Jerusalem (*Jer. lii. 6*), another in the fifth month (*July 4*), in remembrance of the burning of the temple (*Jer. lii. 12, 13*), another in the seventh month (*September 3*), in remembrance of the killing of Gedaliah, which completed their dispersion, and another in the tenth month (*December 10*), in remembrance of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, *2 Kings xxv. 1*. Now it was very commendable in them to keep those fasts, thus to humble themselves under those humbling providences, by which God called them to weeping and mourning, thus to accommodate themselves to their troubles, and prepare themselves for deliverance. It would likewise be a means of possessing their children betimes with a due sense of the hand of the Lord gone out against them. (2.) What was their present doubt—whether they should continue these fasts or no. The case is put as by a single person: *Should I weep?* But it was the case of many, and the satisfaction of one would be a satisfaction to the rest. Or perhaps many had left it off, but the querist will not be determined by the practice of others; if God will have him continue it, he will, whatever others do. His fasting is described by his *weeping, separating himself*. A religious fast must be solemnized, not only by abstinence, here called a separating ourselves from the ordinary lawful comforts of life, but by a godly sorrow for sin, here expressed by weeping. “Should I still keep such *days to afflict the soul* as I have done these so many years?” It is said (*v. 5*) to be seventy years, computed from the last captivity, as before, *ch. i. 12*. The enquiry intimates a readiness to continue it, if God so appoint, though it be a mortification to the flesh. [1.] Something is to be said for the continuance of these fasts. Fasting and praying are good work at any time, and do good; we have always both cause enough and need enough to humble ourselves before God. To throw off these fasts would be an evidence of their being too secure, and a cause of their being more so. They were still in distress, and under the tokens of God’s displeasure; and it is unwise for the patient to break off his course of physic while he is sensible of such remains of his distemper. But, [2.] There is something to be said for the letting fall of these fasts. God had changed the method of his providences con-

cerning them, and returned in ways of mercy to them; and ought not they then to change the method of their duties? Now that the bridegroom has returned, why should the *children of the bride-chamber fast?* Every thing is beautiful in its season. And as to the fast of the fifth month (which is that they particularly enquire about), that, being kept in remembrance of the burning of the temple, might seem to be superseded rather than any of the other, because the temple was now in a fair way to be rebuilt. But, having long kept up this fast, they would not leave it off without advice, and without asking and knowing God’s mind in the case. Note, A good method of religious services, which we have found beneficial to ourselves and others, ought not to be altered without good reason, and therefore not without mature deliberation.

II. An answer given to this case. It should seem that, though the question looked plausible enough, those who proposed it were not conscientious in it, for they were more concerned about the ceremony than about the substance; they seemed to boast of their fasting, and to upbraid God Almighty with it, that he had not sooner returned in mercy to them; “for we have done it *these so many years*.” As those, *Isa. lviii. 3*, *Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not?* And some think that unbelief, and distrust of the promises of God, were at the bottom of their enquiry; for, if they had given them the credit that was due to them, they needed not to doubt but that their fasts ought to be laid aside, now that the occasion of them was over. And therefore the first answer to their enquiry is a very sharp reproof of their hypocrisy, directed, not only to the *people of the land*, but to the *priests*, who had set up these fasts, and perhaps some of them were for keeping them up, to serve some purpose of their own. Let them all take notice that, whereas they thought they had made God very much their debtor by these fasts, they were much mistaken, for they were not acceptable to him, unless they had been observed in a better manner and to better purpose.

1. What they did that was good was not done aright (*v. 5*): *You fasted and mourned*. They were not chargeable with the omission or neglect of the duty, though it was displeasing to the body (thy fasts were *continually before me*, *Ps. l. 8*), but they had not managed them aright. Note, Those that come to enquire of their duty must be willing first to be told of their faults. And those that seem zealous for the outside of a duty ought to examine themselves faithfully whether they have the regard they ought to have to the inside of it. (1.) They had not an eye to God in their fasting: *Did you at all fast unto me, even to me?* He appeals to their own consciences; they will witness against them that they had not been sincere



in it, much more will God, who is greater than the heart and knows all things. You know very well that *you did not at all fast to me; in fasting did you fast to me?* There was the carcase and form of the duty, but none of the life, and soul, and power of it. Was it to me, even to me? The repetition intimates what a great deal of stress is laid upon this as the main matter, in that and other holy exercises, that they be done to God, even to him, with an eye to his word as our rule, and his glory as our end, in them, seeking to please him and to obtain his favour, and studious by the sincerity of our intention to approve ourselves to him. When this was wanting every fast was but a jest. To fast, and not fast to God, was to mock him and provoke him, and could not be pleasing to him. Those that make fasting a cloak for sin, as Jezebel's fast, or by it make their court to men for their applause, as the Pharisees, or that rest in outward expressions of humiliation while their hearts are unhumiliated, as Ahab, do they *fast to God, even to him?* *Is this the fast that God has chosen?* Isa. lviii. 5. If the solemnities of our fasting, though frequent, long, and severe, do not serve to put an edge upon devout affections, to quicken prayer, to increase godly sorrow, and to alter the temper of our minds and the course of our lives for the better, they do not at all answer the intention, and God will not accept them as performed to him, even to him. (2.) They had the same eye to themselves in their fasting that they had in their eating and drinking (v. 6): "*When you did eat, and when you did drink, on other days (nay, perhaps on your fast-days, in the observation of which you could, when you saw cause, dispense with yourselves, and take a liberty to eat and drink), did you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?* Have you not always done as you had a mind yourselves? Why then do you now pretend a desire to know the mind of God? In your religious feasts and thanksgivings you have had no more an eye to God than in your fasts." Or, rather, it refers to their common meals; they did no more design the honour of God in their fasting and praying than they did in their eating and drinking; but self was still the centre in which the lines of all their actions, natural, civil, and religious, met. They needed not be in such care about the continuance of their fasts, unless they had kept them better. Note, We miss our end in eating and drinking when we eat to ourselves and drink to ourselves, whereas we should eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Cor. x. 31), that our bodies may be fit to serve our souls in his service.

2. The principal good thing they should have done was left undone (v. 7): "*Should you not hear the words which the Lord has cried by the former prophets?* Yes, that you should have done on your fast-days; it was

not enough to weep and separate yourselves on your fast-days, in token of your sorrow for the judgments you were under, but you should have searched the scriptures of the prophets, that you might have seen what was the ground of God's controversy with your fathers, and might have taken warning by their miseries not to tread in the steps of their iniquities. You ask, Shall we do as we have done, in fasting? No, you must do that which you have not yet done; you must repent of your sins and reform your lives. This is what we now call you to, and it is the same that the former prophets called your fathers to." To affect them the more with the mischief that sin had done them, that they might be brought to repent of it, he puts them in mind of the former flourishing state of their country: Jerusalem was then *inhabited and in prosperity*, that is now desolate and in distress. The cities round about, that are now in ruins, were then inhabited too and in peace. The country likewise was very populous: *Men inhabited the south of the plain*, which was not at all fortified, and yet they lived safely, and which was fruitful, and so they lived plentifully. But then God by the prophets cried to them, as one in earnest, and importunate with them, to amend their ways and doings, or else their prosperity would soon be at an end. "Now," says the prophet, "you should have taken notice of that, and have inferred that what was required of them for the preventing of the judgments, and which they did not, is required of you for the removal of the judgments; and, if you do it not, all your fasting and weeping signify nothing." Note, The words of the later prophets agree with those of the former; and, whether people are in prosperity or adversity, they must be called upon to leave their sins and do their duty; this must still be the burden of every song.

8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, 9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: 10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. 11 But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. 12 Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. 13 There-

fore it is come to pass, *that* as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: 14 But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.

What was said v. 7, that they *should have heard the words of the former prophets*, is here enlarged upon, for warning to these hypocritical enquirers, who continued their sins when they asked with great preciseness whether they should continue their fasts. This prophet had before put them in mind of their fathers' disobedience to the calls of the prophets, and what was the consequence of it (*ch. i. 4—6*), and now here again; for others' harms should be our warnings. God's judgments upon Israel of old for their sins were written for admonition to us Christians (1 Cor. x. 11), and the same use we should make of similar providences in our own day.

I. This prophet here repeats the heads of the sermons which the former prophets preached to their fathers (v. 9, 10), because the very same things were required of them now. "Thus does the *Lord of hosts speak* to you now, and thus he did speak to your fathers, saying, *Execute true judgment.*" The duties here required of them, which would have been the lengthening of the tranquillity of their fathers and must be the restoring of their tranquillity, are not keeping fasts and offering sacrifices, but *doing justly and loving mercy*, duties which they were bound to by the light and law of nature, though there had been no prophets sent to insist upon them, duties which had a direct tendency to the public welfare and peace, and which they themselves would be the gainers by, and not God. 1. Magistrates must administer justice impartially, according to the maxims of the law and the merits of the cause, without respect of persons: "*Judge judgment of truth*, and execute it when you have judged it." 2. Neighbours must have a tender concern for one another, and must not only do one another no wrong, but must be ready to do one another all the good offices that lie in their power. They must *show mercy and compassion every man to his brother*, as the case called for it. The infirmities of others, as well as their calamities, are to be looked upon with compassion. *Hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim—This kindness we ask and exercise.* 3. They must not bear hard upon those whom they have advantage against, and who, they know, are not able to help themselves. They must not, either in commerce or in course of law, *oppress the widow, the fatherless, the stranger,*

and the poor, v. 10. The weakest must not be thrust to the wall because they are weakest. No thanks to men not to deny right to those who are in a capacity to demand it and recover it; but we must, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake, give those their own who have not power to force it from us. Or it intimates that that which is but exactness with others is exaction upon the widows and the fatherless; nay, that not relieving and helping them as we ought is, in effect, oppressing them. 4. They must not only not do wrong to any, but they must not so much as desire it nor think of it: "*Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.* Do not project it; do not wish it; nay, do not so much as please yourself with the fancy of it." The law of God lays a restraint upon the heart, and forbids the entertaining, forbids the admitting, of a malicious, spiteful, ill-natured thought. Deut. xv. 9, *Beware that there be not a thought in thy Belial heart against thy brother.*

II. He describes the wilfulness and disobedience of their fathers, who persisted in all manner of wickedness and injustice, notwithstanding these exhortations and admonitions frequently given them in God's name; various expressions to this purport are here heaped up (v. 11, 12), setting forth the stubbornness of that carnal mind which is *enmity against God, and is not in subjection to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* They were obstinate and refractory, and persisted in their transgressions of the law purely from a spirit of contradiction to the law. 1. They would not, if they could help it, come within hearing of the prophets, but kept at a distance; or, if they could not avoid hearing what they said, yet they resolved they would not heed it: *They refused to hearken*, and looked another way as if they had not been spoken to. 2. If they did hear what was said to them, and, as it seemed, inclined at first to comply with it, yet they flew off when it came to the setting to, and, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, *they pulled away the shoulder*, and would not submit to the *easy yoke and light burden* of God's commandments. *They gave a withdrawing shoulder* (so the word is); they seemed to lay their shoulder to the work, but they presently withdrew it again, as those Jer. xxxiv. 10, 11. They were like a deceitful bow, as that son that said, *I go, sir, but went not.* 3. They filled their own minds with prejudices against the word of God, and had some objection or other ready wherewith to fortify themselves against every sermon they heard. *They stopped their ears, that they should not hear*, as the deaf adder (Ps. lvi. 4), and none are so deaf as those that will not hear, that *make their own ear heavy*, as the word is. 4. They resolved that nothing which was said to them, for the enforcing of these injunctions, should make any impression upon them: *They made their hearts as an*



*adamant-stone*, as a *diamond*, the hardest of stones to be wrought upon, or as a *flint*, which the mason cannot hew into shape as he can other stone out of the quarry. Nothing is so hard, so unmanageable, so inflexible, as the heart of a presumptuous sinner; and those whose hearts are hard may thank themselves; they are of their own hardening, and it is just with God to give them over to a reprobate sense, to the hardness and impenitence of their own hearts. These stubborn sinners hardened their hearts on purpose lest they should hear what God said to them by the written word, by the law of Moses, and by the words of the prophets that preached to them; they had Moses and the prophets, but resolved they would hear neither, nor would they have been persuaded though one had been sent to them from the dead. The words of the prophet were not regarded by them, though they were words which the Lord of hosts sent and directed to them, though he sent them immediately by his Spirit in the prophets; so that in despising them they affronted God himself and resisted the Holy Ghost. Note, The reason why men are not good is because they will not be so; they will not consider, will not comply; and therefore, if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.

III. He shows the fatal consequences of it to their fathers: *Therefore came great wrath from the Lord of hosts*. God was highly displeased with them, and justly; he required nothing of them but what was reasonable in itself and beneficial to them; and yet they refused, and in a most insolent manner too. What master could bear to be so abused by his own servant? Such an implacable enmity to the gospel as this was to the law and the prophets was that which brought wrath to the uttermost upon the last generation of the Jewish church, 1 Thess. ii. 16. Great sins against the Lord of hosts, whose authority is incontestable, bring great wrath from the Lord of hosts, whose power is irresistible. And the effect was, 1. As they had turned a deaf ear to God's word, so God turned a deaf ear to their prayers, v. 13. As he cried to them in their prosperity to leave their sins, and they would not hear, but persisted in their iniquities, so they cried to him in the day of their trouble to remove his judgments, and he would not hear, but lengthened out their calamities. Those that set God at defiance, in the height of their pride, when pangs came upon them cried unto him. Lord, in trouble have they visited thee. But God has said it, and will abide by it, He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination, Prov xxviii. 9; i. 24, &c. Iniquity, regarded in the heart, will certainly spoil the success of prayer, Ps. lxxvi. 18. 2. As they flew off from their duty and allegiance to God, and were of desultory and unsettled spirits, so God dissipated them and threw

them about as chaff before a whirlwind: *He scattered them among all the nations whom they knew not*, and whom therefore they could not expect to receive any kindness from, v. 14. 3. As they violated all the laws of their land, so God took away all the glories of it: *Their land was desolate after them, and no man passed through or returned*. All that country that was the kingdom of the two tribes, after the dispersion of the remaining Jews, upon the slaughter of Gedaliah, was left utterly uninhabited; there was not man, woman, or child, in it, till the Jews returned at the end of seventy years' captivity; nay, it should seem, the very roads that lay through the country were deserted (none passed or repassed), which, as it had an intimation of mercy in it (though they were cast out of it, yet it was kept empty for their return), so for the present it made the judgment appear much the more dismal; for what a horrid wilderness must a land be that had been so many years uninhabited! And they might thank themselves; it was they that by their own wickedness laid the pleasant land desolate. It was not so much the Chaldeans that did it. No; they did it themselves. The desolations of a land are owing to the wickedness of its inhabitants, Ps. cvii. 34. This came of their wilful disobedience to the law of God. And the present generation saw how desolate sin had made that pleasant land, and yet would not take warning.

#### CHAP. VIII.

The work of ministers is rightly to divide the word of truth and to give every one his portion. So the prophet is here instructed to do, in the further answer he gives to the case of conscience proposed about continuing the public fasts. His answer, in the foregoing chapter, is by way of reproof to those that were disobedient and would not obey the truth. But here he is ordered to change his voice, and to speak by way of encouragement to the willing and obedient. Here are two words from the Lord of hosts, and they are both good words and comfortable words. In the former of these messages (ver. 1) God promises that Jerusalem shall be restored, reformed, replenished (ver. 2-8), that the country shall be rich, and the affairs of the nation shall be successful, their reputation retrieved, and their state in all respects the reverse of what it had been for many years past (ver. 9-15); he then exhorts them to reform what was amiss among them, that they might be ready for these favours designed them, ver. 16, 17. In the latter of these messages (ver. 18) he promises that their fasts should be superseded by the return of mercy (ver. 19), and that thereupon they should be replenished, enriched, and strengthened, by the accession of foreigners to them, ver. 20-23.

AGAIN the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. 3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. 4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every



man with his staff in his hand for very age. 5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. 6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; 8 And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

The prophet, in his foregoing discourses, had left his hearers under a high charge of guilt and a deep sense of wrath; he had left them in a melancholy view of the desolations of their pleasant land, which was the effect of their fathers' disobedience; but because he designed to bring them to repentance, not to drive them to despair, he here sets before them the great things God had in store for them, encouraging them hereby to hope that their case of conscience would shortly determine itself and that God's providence would as loudly call them to *joy and gladness* as ever it called them to *fasting and mourning*. It is here promised,

I. That God will appear for Jerusalem, and will espouse and plead her cause. 1. He will be revenged on Zion's enemies (v. 2): *I was jealous for Zion, or of Zion*; that is, "I have of late been heartily concerned for her honour and interests, with great jealousy." The great wrath that was against her (ch. vii. 12) now turns against her adversaries. I am now *jealous for her with great fury*, and can no more bear to have her abused in her afflictions than I could bear to be abused by her provocations." This he had said before (ch. i. 14, 15), that they might promise themselves as much from the power of his anger, when it was turned for them, as they had felt from it when it was against them. The sins of Zion were her worst enemies, and had done her the most mischief; and therefore God, in his jealousy for her honour and comfort, will *take away her sins*, and then, whatever other enemies injured her, it was at their peril. 2. He will be resident in Zion's palaces (v. 3): "*I have returned to Zion*, after I had seemed so long to stand at a distance, and I will again *dwell in the midst of Jerusalem* as formerly." This secures to them the tokens of his presence in his ordinances and the instances of his favour in his providences.

II. That there shall be a wonderful reformation in Jerusalem, and religion, in the power of it, shall prevail and flourish there.

"*Jerusalem*, that has dealt treacherously both with God and man, shall become so famous for fidelity and honesty that it shall be called and known by the name of a *city of truth*, and the inhabitants of it shall be called *children that will not lie*. The faithful city has become a *harlot* (Isa. i. 21), but shall now become a *faithful city* again, faithful to the God of Israel and to the worship of him only." This was fulfilled; for the Jews after the captivity, though there was much amiss among them, were never guilty of idolatry. Jerusalem shall be called the *mountain of the Lord of hosts*, owning him and owned by him, and therefore the *holy mountain*, cleared from idols and consecrated to God, and not, as it had been, the *mount of corruption*, 2 Kings xxiii. 13. Note, The city of God ought to be a *city of truth* and the *mountain of the Lord of hosts a holy mountain*. Those that profess religion, and relation to God, must study to adorn their profession by all instances of godliness and honesty.

III. That there shall be in Jerusalem a great increase of people, and all the marks and tokens of a profound tranquillity. When it has become a *city of truth* and a *mountain of holiness*, it is then peaceable and prosperous, and every thing in it looks bright and pleasant. 1. You may look with pleasure upon the generation that is going off the stage, and see them fairly quitting it in the ordinary course of nature, and not driven off from it by war, famine, or pestilence (v. 4): *In the streets of Jerusalem*, that had been filled with the bodies of the slain, or deserted and left desolate, shall now dwell *old men and old women*, who have not been cut off by untimely deaths (either through their own intemperance or God's vengeance), but have the even thread of their days spun out to a full length; they shall feel no distemper but the decay of nature, and go to their grave in a full age, as a *shock of corn in his season*. They shall have *every one his staff in his hand, for very age*, to support him, as Jacob, who worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff, Heb. xi. 21. Old age needs a support, and should not be ashamed to use it, but should furnish itself with divine graces, which will be the strength of the heart and a better support than a staff in the hand. Note, The hoary head, as it is a crown of glory to those that wear it, so it is to the places where they live. It is a graceful thing to a city to see abundance of old people in it; it is a sign, not only of the healthfulness of the air, but of the prevalence of virtue and the suppression and banishment of those many vices which cut off the number of men's months in the midst; it is a sign, not only that the climate is temperate, but that the people are so. 2. You may look with as much pleasure upon the generation that is rising up in their room (v. 5): *The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets*. This inti-



mates, (1.) That they shall be blessed with a multitude of children; their families shall increase and multiply, and replenish the city, which was an early product of the divine blessing, Gen. i. 28. Happy the man, happy the nation, whose quiver is full of these arrows! They shall have of both sexes, *boys and girls*, in whom their families shall afterwards be joined, and another generation raised up. (2.) That their children shall be healthful, and strong, and active; their boys and girls shall not lie sick in bed, or sit pining in the corner, but (which is a pleasant sight to parents) shall be hearty and cheerful, and play in the streets. It is their pleasant playing age; let us not grudge it to them; much good may it do them and no harm. *Evil days* will come time enough, and *years* of which they will say that they have *no pleasure in them*, in consideration of which they are concerned not to spend all their time in play, but to remember their Creator. (3.) That they shall have great plenty, meat enough for all their mouths. In time of famine we find the children *swoning as the wounded, in the streets of the city*, Lam. ii. 11, 12. If they are playing in the streets, it is a good sign that they want for nothing. (4.) That they shall not be terrified with the alarms of war, but enjoy a perfect security. There shall be *no breaking in of invaders, no going out of deserters, no complaining in the streets* (Ps. cxliv. 14); for, when there is playing in the streets, it is a sign that there is little care or fear there. Time was when the enemy hunted their steps so closely that they could not go in their streets (Lam. iv. 18), but now they shall *play in the streets* and fear no evil. (5.) That they shall have love and peace among themselves. The boys and girls shall not be fighting in the streets, as sometimes in cities that are divided into factions and parties the children soon imbibe and express the mutual resentments of the parents; but they shall be innocently and lovingly *playing in the streets*, not devouring, but diverting, one another. (6.) That the sports and diversions used shall be all harmless and inoffensive; the boys and girls shall have no other play than what they are willing that persons should see *in the streets*, no play that seeks corners, no playing the fool, or playing the wanton, for it is the mountain of the Lord, the *holy mountain*, but honest and modest recreations, which they have no reason to be ashamed of. (7.) That childish youthful sports shall be confined to the age of childhood and youth. It is pleasing to see the *boys and girls playing in the streets*, but it is ill-favoured to see men and women playing there, who should fill up their time with work and business. It is well enough for *children* to be *sitting in the marketplace*, crossing questions (Matt. xi. 16, 17), but it is no way fit that men, who are able to *work in the vineyard*, should *stand all the day idle* there, Matt. xx. 3.

IV. That the scattered Israelites shall be brought together again from all parts whither they were dispersed (v. 7): "*I will save my people from the east country, and from the west; I will save them from being lost, or losing themselves, in Babylon, or in Egypt, or in any other country whither they were driven.*" They shall neither be detained by the nations among whom they sojourn nor shall they incorporate with them; but I will *save them*, will separate them, and will bring them to their own land again; by the prosperity of their land I will invite them back, and at the same time incline them to return; and *they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem*, shall choose to dwell there, because it is the holy city, though, upon many other accounts, it was more eligible to dwell in the country; and therefore we find (Neh. xi. 2) that *the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem*.

V. That God would renew his covenant with them, would be faithful to them and make them so to him: *They shall be my people and I will be their God*. That is the foundation and crown of all these promises, and is inclusive of all happiness. They shall obey God's laws, and God will secure and advance all their interests. This contract shall be made, shall be new-made, *in truth and in righteousness*. Some think that the former denotes God's part of the covenant (he will be *their God in truth*, he will make good all his promises of favour to them) and the latter man's part of the covenant—they shall be his people in *righteousness*, they shall be a righteous people and shall abound in the *fruits of righteousness*, and shall not, as they have done, deal treacherously and unjustly with their God. See Hos. ii. 19, 20. God will never leave nor forsake them in a way of mercy, as he has promised them; and they shall never leave nor forsake him in a way of duty, as they have promised him. These promises were fulfilled in the flourishing state of the Jewish church, for some ages, between the captivity and Christ's time; they were to have a further and a fuller accomplishment in the gospel-church, that *heavenly Jerusalem*, which is from above, is free, and is the *mother of us all*; but the fullest accomplishment of all will be in the future state.

All these precious promises are here ratified, and the doubts of God's people silenced, with that question (v. 6): "*If it be marvellous in the eyes of this people, should it be marvellous in my eyes?*" If it seem unlikely to you that ever Jerusalem should be thus repaired, should be thus replenished, is it therefore impossible with God?" *The remnant of this people* (and God's people in this world are but a remnant), being few and feeble, thought all this was too good news to be true, especially in *these days*, these difficult days, these cloudy and dark days. Considering how bad the times are, it is

highly improbable, it is morally impossible, they should ever come to be so good as the prophet speaks. How can these things be? How can dry bones live? But should it therefore appear so in the eyes of God? Note, We do both God and ourselves a deal of wrong if we think that, when we are *non-plussed*, he is so, and that he cannot get over the difficulties which to us seem insuperable. *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*; so far are God's thoughts and ways above ours.

9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which *were* in the day *that* the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. 10 For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither *was there any* peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour. 11 But now I *will not be* unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 For the seed *shall be* prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these *things*. 13 And it shall come to pass, *that* as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, *but* let your hands be strong. 14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: 15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. 16 These *are* the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these *are things* that I hate, saith the LORD.

God, by the prophet, here gives further assurances of the mercy he had in store for

Judah and Jerusalem. Here is line upon line for their comfort, as before there was for their conviction. These verses contain strong encouragements with reference to the difficulties they now laboured under. And we may observe,

I. Who they were to whom these encouragements did belong—to those who, in obedience to the call of God by his prophets, applied in good earnest to the building of the temple (*v. 9*): "*Let your hands be strong, that are busy at work for God, you that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, and are not disobedient to them as your fathers were, in the former days, to the words of those prophets that were sent to them. You may take the comfort of the promises, and shall have the benefit of them, who have obeyed the precepts given you in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, when you were told that, having begun with it, you must go on, that the temple might be built; God told you that you must go on with it, and you have laboured hard at it for some time, in obedience to the heavenly vision. Now you are those whose hands must be strengthened and whose hearts must be comforted, with these precious promises; to you is the word of this consolation sent.*" Note, Those, and those only, that are employed for God, may expect to be encouraged by him; those who lay their hands to the plough of duty shall have them strengthened with the promises of mercy; and those who avoid their fathers' faults, not only cut off the entail of the curse, but have it turned into a blessing.

II. What the discouragements were which they had hitherto laboured under, *v. 10*. These are mentioned as a foil to the blessings God was now about to bestow upon them, to make them appear the more strange, to the glory of God, and the more sweet, to their comfort. The truth was the times had long been very bad, and the calamities and difficulties of them were many and great. 1. Trade was dead; there was nothing to be done and therefore nothing to be got. *Before these days of reformation began there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beasts.* The fruits of the earth (though it had long lain fallow, and therefore, one would think, should have been the more fertile) were thin and poor, so that the husbandman had no occasion to hire harvest people to reap his corn, nor teams to carry it home, for he could be scarcely said to have any. Merchants had no goods to import or export, so that they needed not to hire either men or beasts; hence the poor people, who lived by their labour, had no way of getting bread for themselves and their families. 2. Travelling was dangerous, so that all commerce both by sea and land was cut off; nay, none durst stir abroad so much as to visit their friends, *for there was no peace to him that went out, or came in, because of the affliction.* The Sama-



ritans, and Ammonites, and their other evil neighbours, made inroads upon them in small parties, and seized all they could lay their hands on; the roads were infested with highwaymen, and both city and country with housebreakers; so that neither men's persons nor their goods were safe at home or abroad. 3. There was no such thing as friendship or good neighbourship among them: *I set all men every one against his neighbour.* In this there was a great deal of sin, for these wars and fightings came from men's lust, and this God was not the author of; but there was in it a great deal of misery also, and so God was in it a just avenger of their disobedience to him; because they were of an *evil spirit* towards him, a spirit of contradiction to his laws, God sent among them an evil spirit, to make them vexatious one to another. Those that throw off the love of God forfeit the comfort of brotherly love.

III. What encouragement they shall now have to proceed in the good work they are about, and to hope that it shall yet be well with them: "Thus and thus you have been harassed and afflicted, but now God will change his way towards you, *v. 11.* Now that you return to your duty God will comfort you according to the time that he has afflicted you; the ebbing tide shall flow again." 1. God will not proceed in his controversy with them: *I will not be to them as in the former days.* Note, It is with us well or ill according as God is to us; for every creature is that to us which he makes it to be. And, if we walk not contrary to God as in the former days, he will not walk contrary to us as in the former days; for it is only *with the froward* that he will *wrestle*. 2. They shall have great plenty and abundance of all good things (*v. 12*): *The seed sown shall be prosperous, and yield a great increase; the vine shall give her fruit,* which makes glad the heart, and *the ground its products,* which strengthen the heart; they shall have all they can desire, not only for necessity, but for ornament and delight. *The heavens shall give their dew,* without which the earth would not yield her increase, which is a constant intimation to us of the beneficence of the God of heaven to men on earth and of their dependence on him. It is said of a *sweeping rain* that it *leaves no food* (Prov. xxviii. 3); but here the *gentle dew* waters the earth, that it may give *seed to the sower and bread to the eater.* And thus God will *cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.* They are but a *remnant*, a *residue*, very few, one would think scarcely worth looking after; but, now that they are at work for God, he will take care that they shall want nothing which is fit for them. This confirms what the prophet's colleague had said, a little before (Hag. ii. 16, 19), *From this day will I bless you.* Note, God's people, that serve him faithfully, have

great possessions. "All is yours, for you are Christ's." 3. They shall recover their credit among their neighbours (*v. 13*): *You were a curse among the heathen.* Every one censured and condemned them, spoke ill of them, and wished ill to them, upon the account of the great disgrace that they were under; some think that they were made a form of execration, so that if a man would load his enemy with the heaviest curse he would say, *God make thee like a Jew!* "But now, *I will save you, and you shall be a blessing.* Your restoration shall be as much taken notice of to your honour as ever your desolation and dispersion were to your reproach; you shall be applauded and admired as much as ever you were vilified and run down, shall be courted and caressed as much as ever you were slighted and abandoned." Most men smile or frown upon their neighbours according as Providence smiles or frowns upon them; but those whom God plainly blesses as his own, shows favour to and puts honour upon, we ought also to respect and be kind to. The blessed of the Lord are the blessing of the land, and should be so accounted by us. This is here promised to the house both of Israel and Judah; for many of the ten tribes returned out of captivity with the two tribes, and shared with them in those blessings; and, it is probable, besides what came at first, many, very many, flocked to them afterwards, when they saw their affairs take this turn. 4. God himself will determine to do them good, *v. 14, 15.* All their comforts take rise from the thoughts of the love that God had towards them, Jer. xxix. 11. Compare these promises with the former threatenings. (1.) When they *provoked him* to anger with *their sins*, he said that he would *punish them*, and so he did; it was his declared purpose to bring destroying judgments upon them, and, because they repented not of their rebellions against him, he repented not of his threatenings against them, but let the sentence of the law take its course. Note, God's punishing sinners is never a sudden and hasty resolve, but is always the product of thought, and there is a counsel in that part of the will of God. If the sinner turn not, God will not turn. (2.) Now that they pleased him with their services; he said that he would *do them good*; and will he not be as true to his promises as he was to his threatenings? No doubt he will: "So again have I thought to do well to Jerusalem in those days, when you begin to hearken to the voice of God speaking to you by his prophets; and these thoughts also shall be performed."

IV. The use they are to make of these encouragements.

1. Let them take the comfort which these promises give to them: *Fear you not* (*v. 15*); *let your hands be strong* (*v. 9*); and both together (*v. 13*), *Fear not, but let your hands be strong.* (1.) The difficulties they met with in their work must not drive them from it,



nor make them go on heavily in it, for the issue would be good and the reward great. Let this therefore animate them to proceed with vigour and cheerfulness. (2.) The dangers they were exposed to from their enemies must not terrify them; those that have God for them, engaged to do them good, need not fear *what man can do against them*.

2. Let them do the duty which those promises call for from them, *v. 16, 17*. The very same duties which the former prophets pressed upon their fathers from the consideration of the wrath threatened (*ch. vii. 9, 10*) this prophet presses upon them from the consideration of the mercy promised: "Leave it to God to perform for you what he has promised, in his own way and time, but upon condition that you make conscience of your duty. *These are the things then that you shall do*; this is your part of the covenant; these are the articles which you are to perform, fulfil, and keep, that you may not put a bar in your own door and stop the current of God's favours." (1.) "You must never tell a lie, but always speak as you think, and as the matter is, to the best of your knowledge: *Speak you every man the truth to his neighbour*, both in bargains and in common converse; dread every word that looks like a lie." This precept the apostle quotes (*Eph. iv. 25*), and backs it with this reason, *We are members one of another*. (2.) Those that are entrusted with the administration of public justice must see to it, not only that none be wronged by it, but that those who are wronged be righted by it: *Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates*. Let the judges that sit in the gates in all their judicial proceedings have regard both to truth and to peace; let them take care to do justice, to accommodate differences, and to prevent vexatious suits. It must be a judgment of truth in order to peace, and making those friends that were at variance, and a judgment of peace as far as is consistent with truth, and no further. (3.) No man must bear malice against his neighbour upon any account; this is the same with what we had *ch. vii. 10*. We must not only keep our hands from doing evil, but we must watch over our hearts, that they *imagine not any evil* against our neighbour, *Prov. iii. 29*. Injury and mischief must be crushed in the thought, in the embryo. (4.) Great reverence must be had for an oath, and conscience made of it: "Never take a false oath, nay, *love no false oath*: that is, hate it, dread it, keep at a distance from it. Love not to impose oaths upon others, lest they swear falsely; love not that any should take a false oath for your benefit, and forswear themselves to do you a kindness." A very good reason is annexed against all these corrupt and wicked practices: "For all these are things that I hate, and therefore you must hate them if you expect to have God your friend." These things

here forbidden are all of them found among the *seven things which the Lord hates*, *Prov. vi. 16—19*. Note, We must forbear sin, not only because God is angry at it, and therefore it is dangerous to us, but because he hates it, and therefore it ill becomes us and is a very ungrateful thing.

18 And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, 19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace. 20 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: 21 And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. 22 Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is with you*.

These verses contain two precious promises, for the further encouragement of those pious Jews that were hearty in building the temple.

I. That a happy period should be put to their fasts, and there should be no more occasion for them, but they should be converted into thanksgiving days, *v. 19*. This is a direct answer to the enquiry concerning their fasts, *ch. vii. 3*. Those of them that fasted in hypocrisy had their doom in the foregoing chapter, but those that in sincerity humbled themselves before God, and sought his face, have here a comfortable assurance given them of a large share in the happy times approaching. The four yearly fasts which they had religiously observed should be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and solemn feasts, and those cheerful ones. Note, Joyous times will come to the church after troublous times; if weeping endure for more than a night, and joy come not next morning, yet the morning will come that will introduce it at length. And, when God comes towards us in ways of mercy, we must meet him with joy and thankfulness; when God



turns judgments into mercies we must turn fasts into festivals, and thus *walk after the Lord*. And those who sow in tears with Zion shall reap in joy with her; those who submit to the restraints of her solemn fasts while they continue shall share in the triumphs of her cheerful feasts when they come, Isa. lxvi. 10. The inference from this promise is, "*Therefore love the truth and peace; be faithful and honest in all your dealings, and let it be a pleasure to you to be so, though thereby you cut yourselves short of those gains which you see others get dishonestly; and, as much as in you lies, live peaceably with all men, and be in your element when you are in charity. Let the truths of God rule in your heads, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts.*"

II. That a great accession should be made to the church by the conversion of many foreigners, v. 20—23. This was fulfilled but in part when, in the latter times of the Jewish church, there were abundance of proselytes from all the countries about, and some that lay very remote, who came yearly to worship at Jerusalem, which added very much both to the grandeur and wealth of that city, and contributed greatly to the making of it so considerable as it came to be before our Saviour's time, though now it was but just peeping out of its ruins. But it would be accomplished much more fully in the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ, and the incorporating of them with the believing Jews in one great body, under Christ the head, a *mystery* which is made manifest by the *scriptures of the prophets* (Rom. xvi. 26), and by this among the rest, which makes it strange that when it was accomplished it was so great a surprise and stumbling-block to the Jews. Observe,

1. Who they are that shall be added to the church—*people, and the inhabitants of many cities* (v. 20); not only a few ignorant country people that may be easily imposed upon, or some idle people that have nothing else to do, but intelligent inquisitive citizens, men of business and acquaintance with the world, shall embrace the gospel of Christ; *yea, many people and strong nations* (v. 22), some of *all languages*, v. 23. By this it appears that they are brought into the church, not by human persuasion, for they are of different languages, not by external force, for they are strong nations, able to have kept their ground if they had been so attacked, but purely by the effectual working of divine truth and grace. Note, God has his remnant in all parts; and in the general assembly of the church of the first-born some will be found out of *all nations and kindreds*, Rev. vii. 9.

2. How their accession to the church is described: They shall come to *pray before the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts* (v. 21); and, to show that this is the main matter in which their conversion consists,

it is repeated (v. 22): They shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. No mention is made of their offering sacrifices, not only because these were not expected from the proselytes of the gate, but because, when the Gentiles should be brought in, sacrifice and offering should be quite abolished. See who are to be accounted converts to God and members of the church: and all that are converts to God are members of the church. (1.) They are such as *seek the Lord of hosts*, such as enquire for God their Maker, covet and court his favour, and are truly desirous to know his mind and will and sincerely devoted to his honour and glory. *This is the generation of those that seek him.* (2.) They are such as *pray before the Lord*,—such as make conscience, and make a business, of the duty of prayer,—such as dare not, would not, for all the world, live without it,—such as by prayer pay their homage to God, own their dependence upon him, maintain their communion with him, and fetch in mercy and grace from him. (3.) They are such as herein have an eye to the divine revelation and institution, which is signified by their doing this *in Jerusalem*, the place which God had chosen, where his word was, where his temple was, which was a type of Christ and his mediation, which all faithful worshippers will have a believing regard to.

3. How unanimous they shall be in their accession to the church, and how zealous in exciting one another to it (v. 21): *The inhabitants of one city shall go to another*, as formerly when they went up from all parts of the country to worship at the yearly feasts; and they shall say, *Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord; I will go also*. This intimates, (1.) That those who are brought into an acquaintance with Christ themselves should do all they can to bring others acquainted with him; thus Andrew invited Peter to Christ and Philip invited Nathanael. True grace hates monopolies. (2.) That those who are duly sensible of their need of Christ, and of the favour of God through him, will stir up themselves and others without delay to hasten to him: "*Let us go speedily to pray*"; it is for our lives, and the lives of our souls, that we are to petition, and therefore it concerns us to lose no time; in a matter of such moment delays are dangerous." (3.) That our communion with God is very much assisted and furthered by the communion of saints. It is pleasant to go to the house of God in company (Ps. lv. 14), with the multitude (Ps. xlii. 4), and it is of good use to those that do so to excite one another to go speedily and lose no time; we should be glad when it is said to us, *Let us go*, Ps. cxxii. 1. As iron sharpens iron, so may good men sharpen the countenances and spirits one of another in that which is good. (4.) That those who stir up others to that which is good must take heed that they do

not turn off, or tire, or draw back themselves; he that says, *Let us go*, says, *I will go also*. What good we put others upon doing we must see to it that we do ourselves, else we shall be judged out of our own mouths. Not, "Do you go, and I will stay at home;" but, "Do you go, and I will go with you." "A singular pattern (says Mr. Pemble) of zealous charity, that neither leaves others behind nor turns others before it."

4. Upon what inducement they shall join themselves to the church, not for the church's sake, but for his sake who dwells in it (v. 23): *Ten men of different nations and languages shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew*, begging of him not to outgo them, but to take them along with him. This intimates the great honour they have for a Jew, as one of the chosen people of God, and therefore well worthy their acquaintance; they cannot all come to take him by the hand, or embrace him in their arms, but are ambitious to take hold of the skirt of his robe, to touch the hem of his garment, saying, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*. The gospel was preached to the Jews first (for of that nation the apostles were) and by them it was carried to the Gentiles. St. Paul was a Jew whose skirt many took hold of when they welcomed him as *an angel of God*, and begged him to take them along with him to Christ; thus the Greeks took hold of Philip's skirt, saying, *Sir, we would see Jesus*, John xii. 21. Note, It is the privilege of the saints that they have God with them, have him among them—the knowledge, and fear, and worship of him; they have his favour and gracious presence, and this should invite us into communion with them. It is good being with those who have God with them, and those who join themselves to the Lord must join themselves to his disciples; if we take God for our God, we must take his people for our people, cast in our lot among them, and be willing to take our lot with them.

## CHAP. IX.

At this chapter begins another sermon, which is continued to the end of ch. xi. It is called, "The burden of the word of the Lord," for every word of God has weight in it to those who regard it, and will be a heavy weight upon those who do not, a dead weight. Here is, I. A prophecy against the Jews' unrighteous neighbours—the Syrians, Tyrians, Philistines, and others (ver. 1–6), with an intimation of mercy to some of them, in their conversion (ver. 7), and a promise of mercy to God's people, in their protection, ver. 8. II. A prophecy of their righteous King, the Messiah, and his coming, with a description of him (ver. 9) and of his kingdom, the nature and extent of it, ver. 10. III. An account of the obligation the Jews lay under to Christ for their deliverance out of their captivity in Babylon, ver. 11, 12. IV. A prophecy of the victories and successes God would grant to the Jews over their enemies, as typical of our great deliverance by Christ, ver. 13–15. V. A promise of great plenty, and joy, and honour, which God had in reserve for his people (ver. 16, 17), which was written for their encouragement.

**T**HE burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus *shall be* the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, *shall be* toward the Lord. 2 And Hamath also shall

border thereby; Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. 3 And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. 4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire. 5 Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also *shall see it*, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited. 6 And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. 7 And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, *shall be* for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. 8 And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

After the precious promises we had in the foregoing chapter of favour to God's people, their persecutors, who hated them, come to be reckoned with, those particularly that bordered close upon them.

I. The Syrians had been bad neighbours to Israel, and God had a controversy with them. The word of the Lord shall be a *burden in the land of Hadrach*, that is, of Syria, but it does not appear why it was so called. That that kingdom is meant is plain, because Damascus, the metropolis of that kingdom, is said to be the *rest* of this burden; that is, the judgments here threatened shall light and lie upon that city. Those are miserable upon whom the burden of the word of the Lord rests, upon whom *the wrath of God abides* (John iii. 36); for it is a weight that they can neither shake off nor bear up under. There are those whom God *causes his fury to rest* upon. Those whom the wrath of God makes its mark it will be sure to hit; those whom it makes its rest it will be sure to sink. And the reason of this burden's resting on Damascus is because *the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel* (or rather, *even of all the tribes of Israel*), *are towards the Lord*, because the people of God by faith and prayer look up to him for succour and relief and depend upon him to take their part against their enemies. Note, It is a sign that God



is about to appear remarkably for his people when he raises their believing expectations from him and dependence upon him, and when by his grace he turns them from idols to himself. Isa. xvii. 7, 8, *At that day shall a man look to his Maker.* It may be read thus, *for the Lord has an eye upon man, and upon all the tribes of Israel*; he is King of nations as well as King of saints; he governs the world as well as the church, and therefore will punish the sins of other people as well as those of his own people. God is *Judge of all*, and therefore all must give account of themselves to him. When St. Paul was converted at Damascus, and preached there, and disputed with the Jews, then the word of the Lord might be said to rest there, and then *the eyes of men*, of other men besides the tribes of Israel, began to be towards the Lord; see Acts ix. 22. Hamath, a country which lay north of Damascus, and which we often read of, *shall border thereby* (v. 2); it joins to Syria, and shall share in the *burden of the word of the Lord* that rests upon Damascus. The Jews have a proverb, *Woe to the wicked man, and woe to his neighbour*, who is in danger of partaking in his sins and in his plagues. Woe to the land of Hadrach, and woe to Hamath that borders thereby.

II. Tyre and Zidon come next to be called to an account here, as in other prophecies, v. 2—4. Observe here,

1. Tyrus flourishing, thinking herself very safe, and ready to set God's judgments, not only at a distance, but at defiance; for, (1.) She is *very wise*. It is spoken ironically; she thinks herself very wise, and able to outwit even the wisdom of God. It is granted that her king is a great politician, and that her statesmen are so, Ezek. xxviii. 3. But with all their wit and policy they shall not be able to evade the judgments of God when they come with commission; there is no *wisdom nor counsel against the Lord*; nay, it is his honour to take the wise in their own craftiness. (2.) She is very strong, and well fortified both by nature and art: *Tyrus did build herself a strong-hold*, which she thought could never be brought down nor got over. (3.) She is very rich; and *money is a defence*; it is the sinews of war, Eccl. vii. 12. By her vast trade she has *heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets*, that is, she has an abundance of them, heaps of silver as common as heaps of sand, Job xxvii. 16. Solomon made silver to be in Jerusalem as the *stones of the streets*; but Tyre went further, and made *fine gold* to be as the *mire of the streets*. It were well if we could all learn so to look upon it, in comparison with the merchandise of wisdom and grace and the gains thereof.

2. Tyrus falling, after all. Her wisdom, and wealth, and strength, shall not be able to secure her (v. 4): *The Lord will cast her out of that strong-hold* wherein she has for-

tified herself, will *make her poor* (so some read it); there have been instances of those that have fallen from the height of plenty to the depth of poverty, and great riches have come to nothing. God will *smite her power in the sea*; her being surrounded by the water shall not secure her, but *she shall be devoured with fire*, and burnt down to the ground. Tyrus, being seated in the midst of the water, was, one would have thought, in danger of being some time or other overflowed or washed away by that; yet God chooses to destroy it by the contrary element. Sometimes he brings ruin upon his enemies by those means which they least suspect. Water enough was nigh at hand to quench the flames of Tyre, and yet by them she shall be devoured; for who can put out the fire which the breath of the Almighty blows up?

III. God next contends with the Philistines, with their great cities and great lords, that bordered southward upon Israel.

1. They shall be alarmed and affrighted by the word of the Lord lighting and resting upon Damascus (v. 5); the disgraces of Israel had many a time been *published in the streets of Ashkelon*, and they had triumphed in them; but now *Ashkelon shall see* the ruin of her friends and allies, and shall *fear*; *Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron*, concluding that their own turns come next, now that the cup of trembling goes round. What will become of their house when their neighbour's is on fire? They had looked upon Tyre and Zidon as a barrier to their country; but, when those strong cities were ruined, their *expectations* from them *were ashamed*, as our expectation from all creatures will be in the issue.

2. They shall themselves be ruined and wasted. (1.) The government shall be dissolved: *The king shall perish from Gaza*, not only the present king shall be cut off, but there shall be no succession, no successor. (2.) The cities shall be dispeopled: *Ashkelon shall not be inhabited*; the rightful owners shall be expelled, either slain or carried into captivity. (3.) Foreigners shall take possession of their land and become masters of all its wealth (v. 6): *A bastard shall dwell in Ashdod*; a spurious brood of strangers shall enter upon the inheritances of the natives, which they have no more right to than a bastard has to the estates of the legitimate children. And thus God will *cut off the pride of the Philistines*, all the strength and wealth which they prided themselves in, and which were the ground of their confidence in themselves and their contempt of the Israel of God. This prophecy of the destruction of the Philistines, and of Damascus, and Tyre, was accomplished, not long after this, by Alexander the Great, who ravaged all these countries with his victorious army, took the cities, and planted colonies in them, which Quintus Curtius gives a particular account of in the history of his conquests. And so:—



think he is meant by the bastard that shall dwell in Ashdod, for his mother Olympia owned him begotten in adultery, but pretended it was by Jupiter. The Jews afterwards got ground of the Philistines, Syrians, and others of their neighbours, took some of their cities from them and possessed their countries, as appears by the histories of Josephus and the Maccabees, and this was foretold before, Zeph. ii. 4, &c.; Obad. 20.

3. Some among them shall be converted, and brought home to God, by his gospel and grace; so some understand v. 7, as a promise, (1.) That God would take away the sins of these nations—their blood and their abominations, their cruelties and their idolatries. God will part between them and these sins which they have rolled under their tongue as a sweet morsel, and are as loth to part with as men are to part with the meat out of their mouths, and which they hold fast between their teeth. Nothing is too hard for the grace of God to do. (2.) That he would accept of a remnant of them for his own: *He that remains shall be for our God.* God would preserve a remnant even of these nations, that should be the monuments of his mercy and grace and be set apart for him; and the disadvantages of their birth shall be no bar to their acceptance with God, but a Philistine shall be as acceptable to God, upon gospel-terms, as one of Judah, nay, as a governor, or chief one, in Judah, and a man of Ekron shall be as a Jebusite, or a man of Jerusalem, as a proselyted Jebusite, as Araunah the Jebusite, 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. In Christ Jesus there is no distinction of nations, but all are one in him, all alike welcome to him.

IV. In all this God intends mercy for Israel, and it is in kindness to them that God will deal thus with the neighbouring nations, to avenge their quarrel for what is past and to secure them for the future.

1. Thus some understand the seventh verse, as intimating, (1.) That thus God would deliver his people from their bloody adversaries, who hated them, and to whom they were an abomination, when they were just ready to devour them and make a prey of them: *I will take away his blood* (that is, the blood of Israel) out of the mouth of the Philistines and *from between their teeth* (Amos iii. 12), when, in their hatred of them and enmity to them, they were greedily devouring them. (2.) That he would thus give them victory and dominion over them: *And he that remains* (that is, the remnant of Israel) *shall be for our God*, shall be taken into his favour, shall own him and be owned by him, and *he shall be as a governor in Judah*; though the Jews have been long in servitude, they shall recover their ancient dignity, and be victorious, as David and other governors in Judah formerly were; and Ekron (that is, the Philistines) shall be as the Jebusites, and the rest of the devoted nations, who were brought into subjection under them.

2. However, this is plainly the sense of v. 8, that God will take his people under his special protection, and therefore will weaken their neighbours, that it may not be in their power to do them a mischief: *I will encamp about my house because of the army.* Note, God's house lies in the midst of an enemy's country, and his church is as a lily among thorns; and therefore God's power and goodness are to be observed in the special preservation of it. *The camp of the saints*, being a little flock in comparison with the numerous armies of the powers of darkness that are set against it round about, would certainly be swallowed up if the angels of God did not encamp about it, as they did about Elisha, to deliver it, Rev. xx. 9; Ps. xxxiv. 7. When the times are unusually perilous, when armies are marching and counter-marching, and all bearing ill-will to Zion, then Providence will as it were double its guards upon the church of God, *because of him that passes by and because of him that returns*, that whether he return a conqueror or conquered he may do it no harm. And, as none that pass by shall hurt them, so no oppressor shall pass through them any more; they shall have no enemy within themselves to rule them with rigour, and to make their lives bitter to them with sore bondage, as of old in Egypt. This was fulfilled when, for some time after the struggles of the Maccabees, Judea was a free and flourishing state, or perhaps when Alexander the Great, struck with an awe of Jaddus the high priest, favoured the Jews, and took them under his protection, at the same time when he wasted the neighbouring countries. And the reason given for all this is, "*For now have I seen with my eyes*, now have I carefully distinguished between my people and other people, with whom before they seemed to have their lot in common, and have made it to appear that I know those that are mine." This agrees with Ps. xxxiv. 15, *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*; now his eyes, which run to and fro through the earth, shall fix upon them, that he may show himself tender of them, and strong on their behalf, 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. 10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. 11 As for thee also, by the blood of



thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

That here begins a prophecy of the Messiah and his kingdom is plain from the literal accomplishment of the ninth verse in, and its express application to, Christ's riding in triumph into Jerusalem, Matt. xxi. 5; John xii. 15.

I. Here is notice given of the approach of the Messiah promised, as matter of great joy to the Old-Testament church: *Behold, thy king cometh unto thee*. Christ is a king, invested with regal powers and prerogatives, a sovereign prince, an absolute monarch, having all power both in heaven and on earth. He is Zion's king. God has *set him upon his holy hill of Zion*, Ps. ii. 6. In Zion his glory as a king shines; thence *his law went forth*, even the *word of the Lord*. In the gospel-church his spiritual kingdom is administered; it is by him that the ordinances of the church are instituted, and its officers commissioned; and it is taken under his protection; he fights the church's battles and secures its interests, as its king. "This King has been long in coming, but now, *behold, he cometh*; he is at the door. There are but a few ages more to run out, and he that shall come will come. *He cometh unto thee*; the Word will shortly be made flesh, and dwell within thy borders; he will *come to his own*. And therefore *rejoice, rejoice greatly, and shout for joy*; look upon it as *good news*, and be assured it is true; please thyself to think that he is coming, that he is on his way towards thee; and be ready to go forth to meet him with acclamations of joy, as one notable to conceal it, it is so great, nor ashamed to own it, it is so just; cry *Hosanna* to him." Christ's approaches ought to be the church's applauses.

II. Here is such a description of him as renders him very amiable in the eyes of all his loving subjects, and his coming to them very acceptable. 1. He is a righteous ruler; all his acts of government will be exactly according to the rules of equity, for *he is just*. 2. He is a powerful protector to all those that bear faith and true allegiance to him, for *he has salvation*; he has it in his power; he has it to bestow upon all his subjects. He is the *God of salvation*; treasures of salvation are in him. He is *servatus*—*saving himself* (so some read it), rising out of the grave by his own power and so qualifying himself to be our Saviour. (3.) He is a *meek, humble, tender Father* to all his subjects as his children; he is *lowly*; he is *poor* and *afflicted* (so the word signifies), so it denotes the meanness of his condition; having *emptied himself*, he was *despised and rejected of men*. But the evangelist translates it so as to express the temper of his spirit: he is *meek*, not taking state upon him, nor resenting injuries, but *humbling himself* from first

to last, condescending to the mean, compassionate to the miserable; this was a bright and excellent character of him as a prophet (Matt. xi. 29, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*), and no less so as a king. It was a proof of this that, when he made his public entry into his own city (and it was the only passage of his life that had any thing in it magnificent in the eye of the world), he chose to ride, not upon a stately horse, or in a chariot, as great men used to ride, but *upon an ass*, a beast of service indeed, but a poor silly and contemptible one, low and slow, and in those days ridden only by the meaner sort of people; nor was it an ass fitted for use, but an *ass's colt*, a little foolish unmanageable thing, that would be more likely to disgrace his rider than be any credit to him; and that not his own neither, nor helped off, as sometimes a sorry horse is, by good furniture, for he had no saddle, no housings, no trappings, no equipage, but his disciples' clothes thrown upon the colt; for he *made himself of no reputation* when he visited us in great humility.

III. His kingdom is here set forth in the glory of it. This king has, and will have, a kingdom, not of this world, but a spiritual kingdom, a *kingdom of heaven*. 1. It shall not be set up and advanced by external force, by an arm of flesh or carnal weapons of warfare. No; he will *cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horses from Jerusalem* (v. 10), for he shall have no occasion for them while he himself rides upon an ass. He will, in kindness to his people, cut off their horses and chariots, that they may not cut themselves off from God by putting that confidence in them which they should put in the power of God only. He will himself undertake their protection, will himself be a *wall of fire about Jerusalem* and give his angels charge concerning it (those *chariots of fire and horses of fire*), and then the chariots and horses they had in their service shall be discarded and cut off as altogether needless. 2. It shall be propagated and established by the preaching of the gospel, the *speaking of peace to the heathen*; for Christ came and preached peace to those that were afar off and to those that were nigh; and so established his kingdom by proclaiming on earth peace, and good-will towards men. 3. His kingdom, as far as it prevails in the minds of men and has the ascendant over them, will make them peaceable, and slay all enmities; it will cut off the battle-bow, and *beat swords into plough-shares*. It will not only command the peace, but will *create the fruit of the lips, peace*. 4. It shall extend itself to all parts of the world, in defiance of the opposition given to it. "The chariot and horse that come against Ephraim and Jerusalem, to oppose the progress of Zion's King, shall be cut off; his gospel shall be preached to the world, and be received among the heathen, so that *his dominion shall be from*

*sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth, as was foretold by David,"* Ps. lxxii. 8. The preachers of the gospel shall carry it from one country, one island, to another, till some of the remotest corners of the world are enlightened and reduced by it.

IV. Here is an account of the great benefit procured for mankind by the Messiah, which is redemption from extreme misery, typified by the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon (v. 11): *As for thee also (thee, O daughter of Jerusalem! or thee, O Messiah the Prince!) by the blood of thy covenant, by force and virtue of the covenant made with Abraham, sealed with the blood of circumcision, and the covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai, sealed with the blood of sacrifices, in pursuance and performance of that covenant, I have now of late sent forth thy prisoners, thy captives out of Babylon, which was to them a most uncomfortable place, as a pit in which was no water."* It was part of the covenant that, if in the land of their captivity, they sought the Lord, he would be found of them, Lev. xxvi. 42, 44, 45; Deut. xxx. 4. It was *by the blood of that covenant*, typifying the blood of Christ, in whom all God's covenants with man are yea and amen, that they were released out of captivity; and this was but a shadow of the great salvation wrought out by *thy King, O daughter of Zion!* Note, A sinful state is a state of bondage; it is a spiritual prison; it is a pit, or a dungeon, in which *there is no water*, no comfort at all to be had. We are all by nature prisoners in this pit; the *scripture has concluded us all under sin*, and bound us over to the justice of God. God is pleased to deal upon new terms with these prisoners, to enter into another covenant with them; the blood of Christ is the blood of that covenant, purchased it for us and all the benefits of it; by that blood of the covenant effectual provision is made for the sending forth of these prisoners upon easy and honourable terms, and proclamation made of *liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those that were bound*, like Cyrus's proclamation to the Jews in Babylon, which all those whose spirits God stirs up will come and take the benefit of.

12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare *that* I will render double unto thee; 13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man. 14 And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning:

and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. 15 The Lord of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling-stones; and they shall drink, *and* make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, *and* as the corners of the altar. 16 And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: *for they shall be as* the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. 17 For how great *is* his goodness, and how great *is* his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

The prophet, having taught those that had returned out of captivity to attribute their deliverance to the *blood of the covenant* and to the promise of the Messiah (for they were so wonderfully helped because that blessing was in them, was yet in the womb of their nation), now comes to encourage them with the prospect of a joyful and happy settlement, and of glorious times before them; and such a happiness they did enjoy, in a great measure, for some time; but these promises have their full accomplishment in the spiritual blessings of the gospel which we enjoy by Jesus Christ.

I. They are invited to look unto Christ, and flee unto him as their city of refuge (v. 12): *Turn you to the strong-hold, you prisoners of hope.* The Jews that had returned out of captivity into their own land were yet, in effect, but *prisoners (We are servants this day, Neh. ix. 36), yet prisoners of hope, or expectation*, for God had given them a *little reviving in their bondage*, Ezra ix. 8, 9. Those that yet continued in Babylon, detained by their affairs there, yet lived in hope some time or other to see their own land again. Now both these are directed to turn their eyes upon the Messiah, set before them in the promise as their strong-hold, to shelter themselves in him, and stay themselves upon him, for the perfecting of the mercy which by his grace, and for his sake, was so gloriously begun. *Look unto him, and be you saved*, Isa. xlv. 22. The promise of the Messiah was the strong-hold of the faithful long before his coming; they saw his day at a distance and were glad, and the believing expectation of this *redemption in Jerusalem* was long the support and *consolation of Israel*, Luke ii. 25, 38. They, in their dangers and distresses, were ready to turn towards this and the other creature for relief; but the prophets directed them still to turn to Christ, and to comfort themselves with the joy of their king coming to them with salvation. But, as their deliverance was



typical of our redemption by Christ (v. 11), so this invitation to the strong-hold speaks the language of the gospel-call. Sinners are prisoners, but they are prisoners of hope; their case is sad, but it is not desperate; yet now there is hope in Israel concerning them. Christ is a strong-hold for them, a strong tower, in whom they may be safe and quiet from the fear of the wrath of God, the curse of the law, and the assaults of their spiritual enemies. To him they must turn by a lively faith; to him they must flee, and trust in his name.

II. They are assured of God's favour to them: "*Even to day do I declare*, when things are at the worst, and you think your case deplorable to the last degree, yet I solemnly promise that *I will render double unto thee*, to thee, O Jerusalem! to every one of you prisoners of hope. I will give you comforts double to the sorrows you have experienced, or blessings double to what I ever bestowed upon your fathers, when their condition was at the best; the glory of your latter state, as well as of your latter house, shall be greater, shall be twice as great as that of your former." And so it was no otherwise than by the coming of the Messiah, the preaching of his gospel, and the setting up of his kingdom; these spiritual blessings in heavenly things were double to what they had ever enjoyed in their most prosperous state. As a pledge of this, in the fulness of time God here promises to the Jews victory, plenty, and joy, in their own land, which yet should be but a type and shadow of more glorious victories, riches, and joys, in the kingdom of Christ.

1. They shall triumph over their enemies. The Jews, after their return, were surrounded with enemies on all sides. They were *as a speckled bird*; all the birds of the field were against them. Their land lay between the two potent kingdoms of Syria and Egypt, branches of the Grecian monarchy, and what frequent dangers they should be in between them was foretold, Dan. xi. But it is here promised that out of them all the Lord would deliver them; and this promise had its primary accomplishment in the times of the Maccabees, when the Jews made head against their enemies, kept their head above water, and, after many struggles and difficulties, came to be head over them. It is promised, (1.) That they shall be instruments in God's hand for the defeating and baffling of their persecutors: "*I have bent Judah for me*, as my bow of steel; that *bow I have filled with Ephraim* as my arrows, have drawn it up to its full bent, till the arrow be at the head;" for some think that this is signified by the phrase of *filling the bow*. The expressions here are very fine, and the figures lively. Judah had been *taught the use of the bow* (2 Sam. 1. 18), and Ephraim had been famous for it, Ps. lxxviii. 9. But let them not think that they gain

their successes by their own bow, for they themselves are no more than God's bow and his arrows, tools in his hands, which he makes use of and manages as he pleases. which he holds as his bow and directs to the mark as his arrows. The best and bravest of men are but what God makes them, and do no more service than he enables them to do. The preachers of the gospel were the bow in Christ's hand, with which he went forth, he went on, *conquering and to conquer*, Rev. vi. 2. The following words explain this: *I have raised up and animated thy sons, O Zion! against thy sons, O Greece! This was fulfilled when against Antiochus*, one of the kings of the Grecian monarchy, the people that knew their God were *strong and did exploits*, Dan. xi. 32. And they in the hand of an almighty God were made *as the sword of a mighty man*, which none can stand before. Wicked men are said to be God's sword (Ps. xvii. 13), and sometimes good men are made so; for he employs both as he pleases. (2.) That God will be captain, and commander-in-chief, over them, in every expedition and engagement (v. 14): *The Lord shall be seen over them*; he shall make it appear that he presides in their affairs, and that in all their motions they are under his direction, as apparently, though not as sensibly, as he was *seen over Israel* in the pillar of cloud and fire when he led them through the wilderness. [1.] Is their army to be raised, or mustered, and brought into the field? *The Lord shall blow the trumpet*, to gather the forces together, to proclaim the war, to sound the alarm, and to give directions which way to march, which way to move; for, if God blow the trumpet, it shall not give an uncertain sound, nor a feeble ineffectual one. [2.] Is the army taking the field, and entering upon action? Whatever enterprise the campaign is opened with, God shall go forth at the head of their forces, *with whirlwinds of the south*, which were of incredible swiftness and fierceness; and before these whirlwinds thy sons, O Greece! shall be as chaff. [3.] Is the army actually engaged? God's *arrows shall go forth as lightning*, so strongly, so suddenly, so irresistibly; his *lightnings* shall go forth *as arrows*; see Ps. xviii. 14. He *sent out his arrows and scattered them*, that is, he *shot out his lightnings and discomfited them*. This alludes to that which God had done for Israel of old when he brought them out of Egypt, and into Canaan, and had its accomplishment partly in the wonderful successes which the Jews had against their neighbours that attacked them in the time of the Maccabees, by the special appearances of the divine Providence for them, and perfectly in the glorious victories gained by the cross of Christ and the preaching of the cross over Satan and all the powers of darkness, whereby we are made more than conquerors. [4.] Are they in danger of being overpowered by the enemy? *The Lord of hosts shall defend*



them (v. 15); *The Lord their God shall save them* (v. 16); so that their enemies shall not prevail over them, nor prey upon them. God shall be unto them for defence as well as offence, *the shield of their help* as well as *the sword of their excellency*, and this as *the Lord of hosts*, who has power to defend them, and as *their God*, who is engaged by promise to defend them, and by the property he has in them. He shall save them in *that day*, that critical dangerous day, *as the flock of his people*, with the same care and tenderness that the shepherd protects his sheep with. Those are safe whom God saves. [5.] Did their enemies hope to swallow them up? It shall be turned upon them, and they shall devour their enemies, and shall subdue with sling-stones, for want of better weapons, those that come forth against them. The stones of the brook, when God pleases, shall do as great execution as the best train of artillery; for the stars in their courses shall fight on the same side. Goliath was subdued with a sling-stone. Having subdued, they shall devour, shall drink the blood of their enemies, as it were, and, as conquerors are wont to do, they shall make a noise as through wine. It is usual for conquerors with loud huzzas and acclamations to glory in their victories and proclaim them. We read of those that shout for mastery, and of the shout of a king among God's people. They shall be filled with blood and spoil, as the bowls and basins of the temple, or the corners of the altar, were wont to be filled with the blood of the sacrifices; for their enemies shall fall as victims to divine justice.

2. They shall triumph in their God. They shall take the comfort and give God the glory of their successes. So some read v. 15. *They shall eat* (that is, they shall quietly enjoy) what they have got; God will give them power to eat it after they have subdued the sling-stones (that is, their enemies that slung stones at them), and they shall drink and make a noise, a joyful noise, before the Lord their maker and protector, *as through wine*, as men are merry at a banquet of wine. *Being not drunk with wine, wherein is excess*, but filled with the Spirit, they shall speak to themselves and one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, as those that are drunk do with vain and foolish songs, Eph. v. 18, 19. And, in the fulness of their joy, they shall offer abundance of sacrifices to the honour of God, so that they shall fill both the bowls and the corners of the altar with the fat and blood of their sacrifices. And, when they thus triumph in their successes, their joy shall terminate in God as their God, the God of their salvation. They shall triumph, (1.) In the love he has for them, and the relation wherein they stand to him, that they are the flock of his people and he is their Shepherd, and that they are to him as the stones of a crown, which are very precious and of great value, and which are kept under

a strong guard. Never was any king so pleased with the jewels of his crown as God is, and will be, with his people, who are near and dear unto him, and in whom he glories. They are a crown of glory and a royal diadem in his hand, Isa. lxii. 2, 3. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels, Mal. iii. 17. And they shall be lifted up as an ensign upon his land, as the royal standard is displayed in token of triumph and joy. God's people are his glory; so he is pleased to make them, so he is pleased to reckon them. He sets them up as a banner upon his own land, waging war against those who hate him, to whom it is a flag of defiance, while it is a centre of unity to all that love him, to all the children of God, that are scattered abroad, who are invited to come and enlist themselves under this banner, Isa. xi. 10, 12. (2.) In the provision he makes for them, v. 15. This is the matter of their triumph (v. 17): *For how great is his goodness and how great is his beauty!* This is the substance, this the burden, of the songs wherewith they shall make a noise before the Lord. We are here taught, [1.] To admire and praise the amiableness of God's being: *How great is his beauty!* All the perfections of God's nature conspire to make him infinitely lovely in the eyes of all that know him. They are to him as the stones of a crown; but what is he to them? Our business in the temple is to behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps. xxvii. 4), and how great is that beauty! How far does it transcend all other beauties, particularly the beauty of his holiness. This may refer to the Messiah, to Zion's King that cometh. See that king in his beauty (Isa. xxxiii. 17), who is fairer than the children of men, the fairest of ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Though, in the eye of the world, he had no form or comeliness, in the eye of faith how great is his beauty! [2.] To admire and give thanks for the gifts of God's favour and grace, his bounty as well as his beauty; for how great is his goodness! How rich in mercy is he! How deep, how full, are its springs! How various, how plenteous, how precious, are its streams! What a great deal of good does God do! How rich in mercy is he! Here is an instance of his goodness to his people: *Corn shall make the young men cheerful and new wine the maids*; that is, God will bless his people with an abundance of the fruits of the earth. Whereas they had been afflicted with scarcity to such a degree that the young men and the maidens were ready to swoon and faint away for hunger and thirst (Lam. ii. 12, 21; iv. 7, 8; v. 10), now they shall have bread enough and to spare, not water only, but wine, new wine, which shall make the young people grow and be cheerful, and (which some have observed to be the effect of plenty and the cheapness of corn) the poor will be encouraged to marry, and re-people the land, when they shall have where-



withal to maintain their families. Note, What good gifts God bestows upon us we must serve him cheerfully with, and must trace the streams up to the fountain, and, when we are refreshed with corn and wine, must say, *How great is his goodness!*

## CHAP. X.

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of the foregoing chapter—to encourage the Jews that had returned with hopes that though they had been under divine rebukes for their negligence in rebuilding the temple, and were now surrounded with enemies and dangers, yet God would do them good, and make them prosperous at home and victorious abroad. Now, I. They are here directed to eye the great God in all events that concerned them, and, both in the evils they suffered and in the comforts they desired, to acknowledge his hand, ver. 1–4. II. They are encouraged to expect strength and success from him in all their struggles with the enemies of their church and state, and to hope that the issue would be glorious at last, ver. 5–12.

**A**SK ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. 2 For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd. 3 Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle. 4 Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle-bow, out of him every oppressor together.

Gracious things and glorious ones, very glorious and very gracious, were promised to this poor afflicted people in the foregoing chapter; now here God intimates to them that he will for these things be enquired of by them, and that he expects they should acknowledge him in all their ways and in all his ways towards them—and not idols that were rivals with him for their respects.

I. The prophet directs them to apply to God by prayer for rain in the season thereof. He had promised, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that there should be great plenty of corn and wine, whereas for several years, by reason of unseasonable weather, there had been great scarcity of both; but the earth will not yield its fruits unless the heavens water it, and therefore they must look up to God for the dew of heaven, in order to the fatness and fruitfulness of the earth (v. 1): “Ask you of the Lord rain. Do not pray to the clouds, nor to the stars, for rain, but to the Lord; for he it is that hears the heavens, when they hear the earth,” Hos. ii. 21. Seasonable rain is a great mercy, which we must ask of God, rain in the time of the lat-

ter rain, when there is most need of it. The former rain fell at the seed-time, in autumn, the latter fell in the spring, between March and May, which brought the corn to an ear and filled it. If either of these rains failed, it was very bad with that land; for from the end of May to September they never had any rain at all. Jerome, who lived in Judea, says that he never saw any rain there in June or July. They are directed to ask for it in the time when it used to come. Note, We must, in our prayers, dutifully attend the course of Providence; we must ask for mercies in their proper time, and not expect that God should go out of his usual way and method for us. But, since sometimes God denied rain in the usual time as a token of his displeasure, they must pray for it then as a token of his favour, and they shall not pray in vain. *Ask and it shall be given you. So the Lord shall make bright clouds* (which, though they are without rain themselves, are yet presages of rain)—*lightnings* (so the margin reads it), *for he maketh lightnings for the rain.* He will give them showers of rain in great abundance, and so give to every one grass in the field; for God is universally good, and makes his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust.

II. He shows them the folly of making their addresses to idols as their fathers had done (v. 2): *The idols have spoken vanity*; the teraphim, which they courted and consulted in their distress, were so far from being able to command rain for them that they could not so much as tell them when they should have rain. They pretended to promise them rain at such a time, but it did not come. *The diviners, who were the prophets of those idols, have seen a lie* (their visions were all a cheat and a sham); and *they have told false dreams*, such as the event did not answer, which proved that they were not from God. Thus they comforted in vain those that consulted the lying oracles; all the vanities of the heathen put together could not give rain, Jer. xiv. 22. Yet this was not the worst of it; they not only got nothing by the false gods, but they lost the favour of the true God, for *therefore they went their way into captivity as a flock* driven into the fold, and *they were troubled* with one vexation after another, as scattered sheep are, *because there was no shepherd*, no prince to rule them, no priest to intercede for them, none to take care of them and keep them together. Those that wandered after strange gods were made to wander into strange nations.

III. He shows them the hand of God in all the events that concerned them, both those that made against them and those that made for them, v. 3. Let them consider, 1. When every thing went cross it was God that walked contrary to them (v. 3): “*My anger was kindled against the shepherds* that should have fed the flock, but neglected

it, and starved it. I was displeased at the wicked magistrates and ministers, the idol-shepherds." The captivity in Babylon was a token of God's anger against them; in it likewise he *punished the goats*, those of the flock that were filthy and mischievous; they were set on the left hand, to go away into punishment. Though the body of the nation suffered in the captivity, yet it was only the goats and the shepherds that God was angry with, and that he punished; the same affliction to others came from the love of God, and was but a fatherly chastisement, which to them came from his wrath, and was a judicial punishment. 2. When things began to change for the better it was God that gave them the happy turn. "He has now *visited his flock* with favour, to enquire after them, and provides what he finds proper for them, and he has made them *as his goodly horse in the battle*, has beautified them, taken care of them, managed and made use of them, as a man does the horse he rides on, has made them valuable in themselves and formidable to those about them, *as his goodly horse*." It is God that makes us what we are, and it is with us as he appoints.

IV. He shows them that every creature is to them what God makes it to be (v. 4): *Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nails*. 1. All the power that was engaged against them was from God. *Out of him* came all the combined force of their enemies; every *oppressor together* (and the oppressors of Israel were not a few) did but what his hand and his counsel determined before to be done; nor could they have had such power against them unless it had been given them from above. 2. All the power likewise that was engaged for them was derived from him and depended on him. *Out of him* came forth *the corner-stone* of the building, the power of magistrates, which keeps the several parts of the state together. Princes are often called *the corners of the people*, as 1 Sam. xiv. 38, marg. *Out of him* came forth *the nail* that fixed the state, *the nail in the sure place* (Isa. xxii. 23), *the nail in his holy place*, Ezra ix. 8. *Out of him* came forth *the battle-bow*, the military power, and out of him *every oppressor*, or exactor, that had the civil power in his hand; and therefore to God, the fountain of power, we must always have an eye, and see every man's judgment proceeding from him.

5 And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down *their enemies* in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded. 6 And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them:

and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I *am* the LORD their God, and will hear them. 7 And *they of Ephraim* shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD. 8 I will hiss for them, and gather them: for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased. 9 And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again. 10 I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and *place* shall not be found for them. 11 And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away. 12 And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.

Here are divers precious promises made to the people of God, which look further than to the state of the Jews in the latter days of their church, and have certain reference to the spiritual Israel of God, the gospel-church, and all true believers.

I. They shall have God's favour and presence, and shall be owned and accepted of him. This is the foundation of all the rest: *The Lord is with them*, v. 5. He espouses their cause, takes their part, is on their side; and, if he be for them, who can be against them? Again (v. 6), *I have mercy upon them*. All their dignity and joy are owing purely to God's mercy; and mercy, as it supposes misery, so it excludes merit. They had been cast off, the effect of which could not but be misery; they had been justly cast off, and therefore could pretend to merit nothing at God's hand but wrath and the curse; yet it is promised, *They shall be as though I had not cast them off*. The transgressions of their fathers, for which they had been rejected, shall not only not be visited upon them, but shall not be so much as remembered against them. God will be as perfectly reconciled to them as if he had never contended with them, and the falling out of these lovers shall rather be the



renewing than the weakening of love. They shall have such a full assurance of God's being reconciled to them, and upon that shall be so well reconciled to themselves, that they shall be as easy as if they had never been cast off; and their condition, after their restoration to the divine favour, shall be so very happy that there shall not remain the least scar from the wounds which were given them by their being cast off. Such favour does God show to returning repenting sinners, who were by nature at a distance, and children of wrath; such fellowship are they admitted into, and such freedom does he use with them, that they are as *though they had never been cast off*. 1. The covenant they are admitted into is the same that ever it was: *I am the Lord their God*, according to the original contract, the covenant made with their fathers. 2. The communion they are admitted into is the same that ever it was: *I will hear them*. They shall be as welcome as ever to speak to him, and as sure as ever to receive from him an answer of peace; for, as he never did, so he never will, say to Jacob's seed, *Seek you me in vain*.

II. They shall be victorious over their enemies, that would draw them from either their duty to God or their comfort in God (v. 5): *They shall be as mighty men*, that are both strong in body and bold in spirit, men of vigour, men of valour, effective men. *Those of Ephraim*, as well as those of Judah, shall be like a mighty man (v. 7), that dares to go about a difficult enterprise and is able to go through with it. They shall, as mighty men, *tread down their enemies in the battle*, as the dirt that is thrown out of the houses is trodden with other dirt in the mire of the streets. And they shall therefore fight, because the Lord is with them. Some would argue that they may therefore sit still, and do nothing, because the Lord is with them, who can and will do all. No; God's gracious presence with us to help us must not supersede, but quicken and animate, our endeavours to help ourselves; and we must therefore *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*, because it is God that works in us both to will and to do. They shall fight with readiness and resolution because, if God be with them, they are sure to be conquerors, more than conquerors. For then the riders on horses shall be confounded. The cavalry of the enemies shall be routed, and put into disorder, by the infantry of the Jews. The preachers of the gospel of Christ went forth to war a good warfare; they charged bravely, because God was with them; and the riders on horses that opposed them were confounded, for God chose the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. But whence have they all this might? How come they to be so able, so active? It is in the Lord, and in the power of his might, that they are so (v. 6): *I will strengthen the house of Judah*, and

so *I will save the house of Joseph*. Note, God saves us by strengthening us, and works out our happiness by working in us to do our duty. And thus we are engaged to the utmost diligence in using the strength God gives us; and yet, when all is done, God must have the glory of all. God is our strength, and so becomes both our song and our salvation.

III. Those of them that are dispersed shall be gathered together into one body (v. 6): *I will bring them again to place them*, bring them from other lands to place them in their own land. This was a token of their being perfectly restored to all their other ancient privileges—they shall be restored to the possession of their own land. This was fulfilled when the children of God that were scattered abroad were by faith in Christ incorporated in the gospel-church, and Jews and Gentiles became one fold, John x. 16. In order to this (v. 8) *I will hiss for them*, or, rather, *whistle for them*, as the shepherd with his pipe calls his sheep together, that know his voice; and so *I will gather them*. The preaching of the gospel was, as it were, God's hissing for souls to come to Jesus Christ, his calling in his scattered sheep to the green pastures. *I will gather them*, for *I have redeemed them*. Note, Those whom Christ has redeemed by his blood God will gather by his grace, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. This promise is enlarged upon v. 10, *I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt*. Some think this was literally fulfilled when Ptolemæus Philadelphus king of Egypt sent 120,000 Jews out of his country into their own land, as was the promise of gathering them out of Assyria by Alexander the son of Antiochus Epiphanes. But it has its spiritual accomplishment in the gathering in of precious souls out of a bondage worse than that in Egypt or Assyria, and the bringing of them into the glorious liberties of the children of God and their enjoyments, which are as the beautiful fruitful pastures in the land of Gilead and Lebanon. All the land of promise is theirs, even Gilead, the utmost border of it eastward, and Lebanon, the utmost border northward. But how shall this be? How shall a people so dispersed be got together? How shall those that are set at such a distance from their own country be brought to it again? It is true the difficulties seem insuperable, but they shall be got over as easily, as effectually as those that lay in the way of their deliverance out of Egypt and their entrance into Canaan: *He shall pass through the sea with affliction*, as of old through the Red Sea, to the sore affliction of Pharaoh and his hosts, or to the sore affliction of the sea, the waves whereof he shall smite, so that it shall be driven back, as when the sea saw and fled, Ps. cxiv. 3. And all the deeps of the river (all the rivers, though ever so deep) shall dry up, as Jordan did, to make



way for Israel's passage into that good land which God had given them. Does *the pride of Assyria* stand in the way of their deliverance? He shall give check to it who sets bounds to the *proud waves of the sea*, and it shall be brought down. Does the sceptre of Egypt oppose it? That shall depart away, so that it shall not be able to obstruct the gathering in of God's Israel when his time shall come for the doing of it. When the gospel-church was to be gathered out of all nations by the preaching of the gospel great opposition was given to it by the enraged combined powers of earth and hell. Insurmountable difficulties seemed to be in the way of it. But, by a divine power going along with the doctrine of Christ, it became mighty to the pulling down of strong holds, and the conversion and salvation of thousands. Then the sea fled, and Jordan was driven back at the presence of the Lord.

IV. They shall greatly multiply, and the church, that new world, shall be replenished (v. 8): *They shall increase as they have increased* formerly in Egypt, and great additions shall be made to their numbers, as in the days of David and Solomon. When God gathers his redeemed ones to himself they shall help to gather in others with them, and their motion homeward shall be like that of a snow-ball. *Crescit eundo—The further it goes the larger it grows by accretion. I will gather them, and they shall increase.* Note, The church of Christ is a growing body, as long as it is in the present state of minority, till it comes to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. There are added to it daily such as shall be saved. 1. It shall spread to distant places. It shall fill Canaan, even to the lands of Gilead and Lebanon, so that no more place, no more room, shall be found for it there, v. 10. In Judah only God had been known, and his name was great in Israel only; here only he revealed his statutes and judgments. But in gospel-times that place shall be much too strait; the church's tent must be enlarged, and its cords lengthened: Then *I will sow them among the people*, v. 9. Their scattering shall be like the scattering of seed in the ground, not to bury it, but to increase it, that it may bring forth much fruit. The Jews are said to be dispersed into every nation under heaven (Acts ii. 5); and, as it was their troubles that dispersed some of them, so perhaps others transplanted themselves into colonies because the land of Israel was too strait for them; and many were natives of other nations, but proselyted to the Jewish religion. Now these were sown among the people, Hos. ii. 23. And this contributed very much to the spreading of the gospel. The Jews that came from all parts to worship at Jerusalem fetched thence the gospel light and fire to their own countries, as those Acts ii., and the eunuch, Acts viii. And their own synagogues in the several

cities of the Gentiles were the first receptacles of the apostles and their preaching, wherever they came. Thus when God sowed them among the people, that they might not get hurt by the Gentiles, but do good to them, he took care that they should remember him, and make mention of his name in far countries; and, by keeping up the knowledge of God among them as he had revealed himself in the Old Testament, they would be the more ready to admit the knowledge of Christ as he has revealed himself in the New Testament. 2. It shall last to future ages. The church shall not be *res unus ætatis*—a temporary thing, but a seed in it shall serve the Lord, v. 7. *Yea, their children shall see it and be glad; and they shall live with their children, and turn again*, v. 9. Converts to Christ shall have their children about them, whom they shall teach the knowledge of the Lord, and bring with them when they turn again to the holy land and the way of holiness. It was said to those to whom the gospel was first preached, *The promise is to you and to your children*, Acts ii. 39. They shall be so sown among the people as never to be extirpated. Christ's family upon earth shall never be extinct, nor his purchased possession lost for want of heirs.

V. God himself will be both their strength and their song. 1. In him they shall be comforted, and shall have abundant satisfaction (v. 7): *Their heart shall rejoice as through wine; for Christ's love, which is their joy, is better than wine.* They shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice. When we resolutely resist, and so overcome, our spiritual enemies, then our hearts shall rejoice. But we ruin our own joy if our resistance be feeble and we yield to the temptations of Satan. *Their heart shall rejoice, and then they shall be as a mighty man; for the joy of the Lord will be our strength.* And with their graces their joys shall be propagated: *Their children shall see it and be glad, and their hearts also shall rejoice in the Lord.* It is good to acquaint children betimes with the delights of religion, and to make the services of it as pleasant as may be to them, that, learning betimes to rejoice in the Lord, they may with purpose of heart cleave to him. 2. By him they shall be carried on with vigour, and enlargement of heart, in his service (v. 12): *I will strengthen them in the Lord*, strengthen them for their walk and work, as well as for their warfare. It is the God of Israel that gives strength and power unto his people, that strengthens all their powers and faculties for spiritual performances, above what they are by nature and against what they are by the corruption of nature. Now observe, (1.) How they are thus enabled and invigorated for their duty: *I the Lord will strengthen them in the Lord, in the Messiah, who is Jehovah our strength, as well as Jehovah our righteousness.* Strength is treasured up for us in Christ, and from



him it is communicated to us. It is *through Christ strengthening us* that we can do all things, and *without him we can do nothing*. His strength is commanded him for this purpose, Ps. lxxviii. 28. (2.) What good use they shall make of this strength given unto them: *They shall walk up and down in his name*. If God strengthen us, we must bestir ourselves, must *walk up and down* in all the duties of the Christian life, must be active and busy in the work of God, must walk up and down as industrious men do, losing no time, and letting slip no opportunity. But still we must *walk up and down in the name of Christ*, must do all by warrant from him and in dependence on him, with an eye to his word as our rule and his glory as our end. To us to live must be Christ; and, *whatever we do in word or deed*, we must do *all in the name of the Lord Jesus*, that we receive not the strengthening grace of God in vain. See Ps. lxxx. 17, 18.

## CHAP. XI.

God's prophet, who, in the chapters before, was an ambassador sent to promise peace, is here a herald sent to declare war. The Jewish nation shall recover its prosperity, and shall flourish for some time and become considerable; it shall be very happy, at length, in the coming of the long-expected Messiah, in the preaching of his gospel, and in the setting up of his standard there. But, when thereby the chosen remnant among them are effectually called in and united to Christ, the body of the nation, persisting in unbelief, shall be utterly abandoned and given up to ruin, for rejecting Christ; and it is this that is foretold here in this chapter—the Jews rejecting Christ, which was their measure-filling sin, and the wrath which for that sin came upon them to the uttermost. Here is, 1. A prediction of the destruction itself that should come upon the Jewish nation, ver. 1–3. 11. The putting of it into the hands of the Messiah. 1. He is charged with the custody of that flock, ver. 4–5. 2. He undertakes it, and bears ruin in it, ver. 7, 8. 3. Finding it perverse, he gives it up (ver. 9), breaks his shepherd's staff (ver. 10, 11), resents the indignities done him and the contempt put upon him (ver. 12, 13), and then breaks his other staff, ver. 14. 4. He turns them over into the hands of foolish shepherds, who, instead of preventing, shall complete their ruin, and both the blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch, ver. 15–17. This is foretold to the poor of the flock before it comes to pass, that, when it does come to pass, they may not be offended.

**O**PEN thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. 2 Howl, fir-tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty is spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. 3 *There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.*

In dark and figurative expressions, as is usual in the scripture predictions of things at a great distance, that destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish church and nation is here foretold which our Lord Jesus, when the time was at hand, prophesied of very plainly and expressly. We have here, 1. Preparation made for that destruction (v. 1): "*Open thy doors, O Lebanon! Thou wouldst not open them to let thy king in—he came to his own and his own received him not; now thou must open them to let thy ruin in.*"

Let the gates of the forest, and all the avenues to it, be thrown open, and let the fire come in and devour its glory." Some by Lebanon here understand the temple, which was built of cedars from Lebanon, and the stones of it white as the snow of Lebanon. It was burnt with fire by the Romans, and its gates were forced open by the fury of the soldiers. To confirm this, they tell a story, that forty years before the destruction of the second temple the gates of it opened of their own accord, upon which prodigy Rabbi Johanan made this remark (as it is found in one of the Jewish authors), "Now I know," said he, "that the destruction of the temple is at hand, according to the prophecy of Zechariah, *Open thy doors, O Lebanon! that the fire may devour thy cedars.*" Others understand it of Jerusalem, or rather of the whole land of Canaan, to which Lebanon was an inlet on the north. All shall lie open to the invader, and the cedars, the mighty and eminent men, shall be devoured, which cannot but alarm those of an inferior rank, v. 2. If the cedars have fallen (if all the mighty are spoiled, and brought to ruin), let the fir-tree howl. How can the slender fir-trees stand if stately cedars fall? If cedars are devoured by fire, it is time for the fir-trees to howl; for no wood is so combustible as that of the fir. And let the oaks of Bashan, that lie exposed to every injury, howl, for the forest of the vintage (or the flourishing vineyard, that used to be guarded with a particular care) has come down, or (as some read it) when the defenced forests, such as Lebanon was, have come down. Note, The falls of the wise and good into sin, and the falls of the rich and great into trouble, are loud alarms to those that are every way their inferiors not to be secure. 2. Lamentation made for the destruction (v. 3): *There is a voice of howling*. Those who have fallen howl for grief and shame, and those who see their own turn coming howl for fear. But the great men especially receive the alarm with the utmost confusion. Those who were roaring in the day of their revels and triumphs are howling in the day of their terrors; for now they are tormented more than others. Those great men were by office shepherds, and such should have protected God's flock committed to their charge; it is the duty both of princes and priests. But they were as young lions, that made themselves a terror to the flock with their roaring and the flock a prey to themselves with their tearing. Note, It is sad with a people when those who should be as shepherds to them are as young lions to them. But what is the issue? The shepherds howl, for their glory is spoiled. Their pastures, and the flocks which covered them, which were the glory of the swains, are laid waste. The young lions howl, for the pride of Jordan is spoiled. The pride of Jordan was the thickets on the banks, in which the lions

reposed themselves; and therefore, when the river overflowed and spoiled them, the lions came up from them (as we read Jer. xlix. 19), and they came up roaring. Note, When those who have power proudly abuse their power, and, instead of being shepherds, are as young lions, they may expect that the righteous God will humble their pride and break their power.

4 Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; 5 Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not. 6 For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them. 7 And I will feed the flock of slaughter, *even* you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock. 8 Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. 9 Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another. 10 And I took my staff, *even* Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. 11 And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it *was* the word of the LORD. 12 And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver. 13 And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty *pieces* of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD. 14 Then I cut asunder mine other staff, *even* Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

The prophet here is made a type of Christ,

as the prophet Isaiah sometimes was; and the scope of these verses is to show that *for judgment Christ came into this world* (John ix. 39), for judgment to the Jewish church and nation, which were, about the time of his coming, wretchedly corrupted and degenerated by the worldliness and hypocrisy of their rulers. Christ would have healed them, but they would not be healed; they are therefore left desolate, and abandoned to ruin. Observe here,

I. The desperate case of the Jewish church, under the tyranny of their own governors. Their slavery in their own country made them as miserable as their captivity in strange countries had done: *Their possessors slay them and sell them, v. 5.* In Zechariah's time we find the rulers and the nobles justly rebuked for *exacting usury of their brethren*; and the governors, even by their servants, oppressive to the people, Neh. v. 7, 15. In Christ's time the *chief priests and the elders*, who were the possessors of the flock, by their traditions, the commandments of men, and their impositions on the consciences of the people, became perfect tyrants, devoured their houses, engrossed their wealth, and fleeced the flock instead of feeding it. The Sadducees, who were deists, corrupted their judgments. The Pharisees, who were bigots for superstition, corrupted their morals, by making void the commandments of God, Matt. xv. 16. Thus they slew the sheep of the flock, thus they sold them. They cared not what became of them so they could but gain their own ends and serve their own interests. And, 1. In this they justified themselves: *They slay them and hold themselves not guilty.* They think that there is no harm in it, and that they shall never be called to an account for it by the chief Shepherd; as if their power were given them for destruction, which was designed only for edification, and as if, because they sat in Moses's seat, they were not under the obligation of Moses's law, but might dispense with it, and with themselves in the breach of it, at their pleasure. Note, Those have their minds woefully blinded indeed who do ill and justify themselves in doing it; but God will not hold those guiltless who hold themselves so. 2. In this they affronted God, by giving him thanks for the gain of their oppression: They said, *Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich*, as if, because they prospered in their wickedness, got money by it, and raised estates, God had made himself patron of their unjust practices, and Providence had become *particeps criminis—the associate of their guilt.* What is got honestly we ought to give God thanks for, and to bless him whose blessing *makes rich and adds no sorrow with it.* But with what face can we go to God either to beg a blessing upon the unlawful methods of getting wealth or to return him thanks for success in them? They should rather have gone to God to confess the sin, to take shame



to themselves for it, and to vow restitution, than thus to mock him by making the gains of sin the gift of God, who *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*, and reckons not himself praised by the thanksgiving if he be dishonoured either in the getting or the using of that which we give him thanks for. 3. In this they put contempt upon the people of God, as unworthy their regard or compassionate consideration: *Their own shepherds pity them not*: they make them miserable, and then do not commiserate them. Christ had *compassion on the multitude because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as if they had no shepherd* (as really they had worse than none); but *their own shepherds pitied them not*, nor showed any concern for them. Note, It is ill for a church when its pastors have no tenderness, no compassion for precious souls, when they can look upon the ignorant, the foolish, the wicked, the weak, without pity.

II. The sentence of God's wrath passed upon them for their senselessness and stupidity in this condition. There was a general decay, nay, a destruction, of religion among them, and it was all one to them; they regarded it not. *My people love to have it so*, Jer. v. 31. Though they were *oppressed and broken in judgment*, yet they *willingly walked after the commandment*, Hos. v. 11. And, as their shepherds pitied them not, so they did not bemoan themselves; therefore God says (v. 6), "*I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land*. They have courted their own destruction, and so let their doom be." But those are truly miserable whom the God of mercy himself will no more have compassion upon. Those who are willing to have their consciences oppressed by those who *teach for doctrines the commandments of men* (as the Jews were, who called those *Rabbi, Rabbi*, that did so, Matt. xv. 9; xxiii. 7), are often punished by oppression in their civil interests, and justly, for those forfeit their own rights who tamely give up God's rights. The Jews did so; the Papists do so; and who can pity them if they be ruled with rigour? God here threatens them, 1. That he will deliver them into the hand of oppressors, *every one into his neighbour's hand*, so that they shall use one another barbarously. The several parties in Jerusalem did so; the *zealots*, the *seditions*, as they were called, committed greater outrages than the common enemy did, as Josephus relates in his history of the wars of the Jews. They shall be delivered every one *into the hand of his king*, that is, the Roman emperor, whom they chose to submit to rather than to Christ, saying, *We have no king but Cæsar*. Thus they thought to ingratiate themselves with their lords and masters. But for this God brought the Romans upon them, who *took away their place and nation*. 2. That he will not deliver them out of their hands: *They shall smite the land*, the whole land,

and out of their hand I will not deliver them; and, if the Lord do not help them, none else can, nor can they help themselves.

III. A trial yet made whether their ruin might be prevented by sending Christ among them as a shepherd; God had sent his servants to them in vain, *but last of all he sent unto them his Son, saying, They will reverence my Son*, Matt. xxi. 37. Divers of the prophets had spoken of him as the *Shepherd of Israel*, Isa. xl. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 23. He himself told the Pharisees that he was the *Shepherd of the sheep*, and that those who pretended to be shepherds were *thieves and robbers* (John x. 1, 2, 11), apparently referring to this passage, where we have, 1. The charge he received from his Father to try what might be done with this flock (v. 4): *Thus saith the Lord my God* (Christ called his Father *his God* because he acted in compliance with his will and with an eye to his glory in his whole undertaking), *Feed the flock of the slaughter*. The Jews were God's flock, but they were *the flock of slaughter*, for their enemies had killed them all the day long and accounted them *as sheep for the slaughter*; their own possessors slew them, and God himself had doomed them to the slaughter. Yet "*feed them by reproof, instruction, and comfort*; provide wholesome food for those who have so long been soured with the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees." *Other sheep he had, which were not of this fold*, and which afterwards must be brought; but he is first *sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, Matt. xv. 24. 2. His acceptance of this charge, and his undertaking pursuant to it, v. 7. He does as it were say, *Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God!* and, since this is thy will, it is mine: *I will feed the flock of slaughter*. Christ will care for these lost sheep; he will go about among them, *teaching and healing even you, O poor of the flock!* Christ did not neglect the meanest, nor overlook them for their meanness. The shepherds that made a prey of them regarded not the poor; they were conversant with those only that they could get by; but Christ preached his gospel *to the poor*, Matt. xi. 5. It was an instance of his humiliation that his converse was mostly with the inferior sort of people; his disciples, who were his constant attendants, were of the poor of the flock. 3. His furnishing himself with tools proper for the charge he had undertaken: *I took unto me two staves*, pastoral staves; other shepherds have but one crook, but Christ had two, denoting the double care he took of his flock, and what he did both for the souls and for the bodies of men. David speaks of God's *rod* and his *staff* (Ps. xxiii. 4), a correcting rod and a supporting staff. One of these staves was called *Beauty*, denoting the temple, which is called *the beauty of holiness* and one of its gates *beautiful*, which Christ called his Father's house, and for which he showed a



great zeal when he cleared it of the *buyers and sellers*; the other he called *Bands*, denoting their civil state, and the incorporate society of that nation, which Christ also took care of by preaching love and peace among them. Christ, in his gospel, and in all he did among them, consulted the advancement both of their civil and of their sacred interests. 4. His execution of his office, as the chief Shepherd. *He fed the flock* (v. 7), and he displaced those under-shepherds that were false to their trust (v. 8): *Three shepherds I cut off in one month*. Through the deficiency and uncertainty of the history of the Jewish church, in its latter ages, we know not what particular event this had its accomplishment in; in general, it seems to be an act of power and justice for the punishment of the sinful shepherds and the redress of the grievances of the abused flock. Some understand it of the three orders of princes, priests, and scribes or prophets, who, when Christ had finished his work, were laid aside for their unfaithfulness. Others understand it of the three sects among the Jews, of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, all whom Christ silenced in dispute (Matt. xxii.) and soon after *cut off*, all in a little time.

IV. Their enmity to Christ, and making themselves odious to him. He came to his own, the sheep of his own pasture; it might have been expected that between them and him there would be an entire affection, as between the shepherd and his sheep; but they conducted themselves so ill that *his soul loathed them*, was *strained* towards them (so it may be read); he intended them kindness, but could not do them the kindness he intended them, *because of their unbelief*, Matt. xiii. 58. He was disappointed in them, discouraged concerning them, *grieved* for them, not only for the shepherds, whom he cut off, but for the people, whom Christ often looked upon with grief in his heart and tears in his eyes. Their provocations even wore out his patience, and he was weary of that *faithless and perverse generation*. *Their soul also it abhorred me*; and therefore it was that his soul loathed them; for, whatever estrangement there is between God and man, it begins on man's side. The Jewish shepherds rejected this chief Shepherd, as the Jewish builders rejected this chief corner stone. They had *indignation* at Christ's doctrine and miracles, and his interest in the people, to whom they did all they could to render him odious, as they had made themselves odious to him. Note, There is a mutual enmity between God and wicked people; they are hateful to God and haters of God. Nothing speaks more the sinfulness and misery of an unregenerate state than this does. The carnal mind, the friendship of the world, are enmity to God, and God hates all the workers of iniquity; and it is easy to foresee what this will end in, if

the quarrel be not taken up in time, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

V. Christ's rejecting them as incurable, and leaving them their house desolate, Matt. xxiii. 38. The things of their peace are now hidden from their eyes, because they knew not the day of their visitation. Here we have.

1. The sentence of their rejection passed (v. 9): "*Then said I, I will not feed you. I will take no further care of you; you shall not see me again*; take your own course. *As I will not feed you, so I will not cure you; that that dieth, let it die* (the Shepherd will do nothing to save its forfeited life); *that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off*; that which will make itself a prey to the wolf, let it be a prey, and let the rest so far forget their own mild and gentle nature as to *eat the flesh of one another*; let these sheep fight like dogs." Those that reject Christ will be certainly and justly rejected by him, and then are miserable of course.

2. A sign of it given (v. 10): *I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder*, in token of this, that he would be no longer a shepherd to them, as the lord high steward determines his commission by breaking his white staff, and as Moses's breaking the tables of the law put a stop, for the present, to the treaty between God and Israel. The breaking of this staff signified the breaking of God's covenant which he had made *with all the people*, the covenant of peculiarity made with all the tribes of Israel, and all other people who, by being proselyted to their religion, were incorporated into their nation. The Jewish church was now stripped of all its glory; its crown was profaned and cast to the ground, and all its honour laid in the dust; for God departed from it, and would no more own it for his. When Christ told them plainly that the *kingdom of God* should be *taken from them*, and *given to another people*, then he broke the *staff of Beauty*, Matt. xxi. 43. And it was broken *in that day*, though Jerusalem and the Jewish nation held up forty years longer, yet from that day we may reckon the staff of Beauty broken, v. 11. And though the great men did not, or would not, understand it as a divine sentence, but thought to put it by with a cold *God forbid* (Luke xx. 16), yet the *poor of the flock*, the disciples of Christ, *waited on him*, and understood with what authority he spoke, and could distinguish the voice of their Shepherd from that of a stranger, *knew that it was the word of the Lord*, and trembled at it, and were confident that it should not fall to the ground. Note, Christ is waited on by the poor of the flock; he chose them to be with him, to be his pupils, to be his witnesses; the poor received him and his gospel, when those that had great possessions turned their backs upon him. And those that wait upon Christ, that sit at his feet, to hear and receive his words,



shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, John vii. 17.

3. A further reason given for their rejection. It was said before, *Their souls abhorred him*; and here we have an instance of it, their buying and selling him for thirty pieces of silver, either thirty Roman pence, or rather thirty Jewish shekels; this is here foretold in somewhat obscure expressions, as it is fit that such particular prophecies should be delivered, lest otherwise the plainness of the prophecy might prevent the accomplishment of it. Here, (1.) The Shepherd comes to them for his wages (v. 12): "*If you think good, give me my price; you are weary of me, pay me off and discharge me; and, if not, forbear; if you be willing to continue me longer in your service, I will continue, or, if to turn me off without wages, I am content.*" Christ was no hireling, and yet the labourer is worthy of his hire. Compare with this what Christ said to Judas when he was going to sell him, "*What thou doest do quickly; be at a word with the chief priests; let them either take the bargain or leave it,*" John xiii. 27. Those that betray Christ are not forced to it; they might have chosen. (2.) They value him at *thirty pieces of silver*. Many years' service he had done them as a Shepherd, yet this is all they will now turn him off with—"A goodly price that I with all my care and pains was valued at by them." If Judas fixed this sum in his demand, it is observable that his name was *Judah*, the same name with that of the body of the people, for it was a national act; or, if (as it rather seems) the chief priests pitched upon this sum in their proffers, they were the representatives of the people; it was part of the priest's office to put a value upon the devoted things (Lev. xxvii. 8), and thus they valued the Lord Jesus. It was the ordinary price of a slave, Exod. xxi. 32. Making light of Christ, and undervaluing the love of that great and good Shepherd, are the ruin of multitudes, and justly so. (3.) The silver being no way proportionable to his worth, it is *thrown to the potter* with disdain: "Let him take it to buy clay with, or for any use that a little money will serve to, for it is not worth hoarding; it may be enough for a potter's stock, but not for the pay of such a shepherd, much less for his purchase." So the prophet cast the *thirty pieces of silver to the potter in the house of the Lord*: "Let him take them, and do what he will with them." Now we find a particular accomplishment of this in the history of Christ's sufferings, and reference is had to this prophecy, Matt. xxvii. 9, 10. *Thirty pieces of silver* was the very sum for which Christ was sold to the chief priests; the money, when Judas would not keep it, and the chief priests would not take it back, was laid out in the purchase of the *potter's field*. Even that sudden resolve of the chief priests was according to an ancient prophecy and the more ancient counsel and foreknowledge of God.

4. The completing of their rejection in the cutting asunder of the other staff, v. 14. The former denoted the ruin of their church, by breaking the covenant between God and them—that defaced their *beauty*; this denotes the ruin of their state, by breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel, by reviving animosities and contention among them, such as were of old between Judah and Israel, the writing of whom as *one stick in the hand of the Lord* was one of the blessings promised after their return out of captivity, Ezek. xxxvii. 19. But that union shall now be dissolved; they shall be crumbled into parties and factions, exasperated one against another; and their kingdom, being thus divided, shall be brought to desolation. (1.) Nothing ruins a people so certainly, so inevitably, as the breaking of the *staff of Bands*, and the weakening of the brotherhood among them; for hereby they become an easy prey to the common enemy. (2.) This follows upon the dissolving of the covenant between God and them, and the decay of religion among them. When iniquity abounds love waxes cold. No wonder if those fall out among themselves that have provoked God to fall out with them. When the staff of Beauty is broken the staff of Bands will not hold long. An unchurched people will soon be an undone people.

15 And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. 16 For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, *which* shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. 17 Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword *shall be* upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

God, having shown the misery of this people in their being justly abandoned by the good Shepherd, here shows their further misery in being shamefully abused by a foolish shepherd. The prophet is himself to personate and represent this pretended shepherd (v. 15): *Take unto thee the instruments or accoutrements of a foolish shepherd*, that are no way fit for the business, such a shepherd's coat, and bag, and staff, as a foolish shepherd would appear in; for such a shepherd shall be set over them (v. 16), who, instead of protecting them, shall oppress them and do them mischief. 1. They shall be under the inspection of unfaithful ministers. Their scribes, and priests, and doctors of their law, shall bind heavy

burdens upon them, and grievous to be borne, and, with their traditions imposed, shall make the ceremonial law much more a yoke than God had made it. The description here given of the foolish shepherd suits very well with the character Christ gives of the scribes and Pharisees, Matt. xxiii. 2. They shall be under the tyranny of unmerciful princes, that shall rule them with rigour, and make their own land as much a house of bondage to them as ever Egypt or Babylon was. When they had rejected him *by whom princes decree justice* it was just that they should be turned over to those who *decree unrighteous decrees*. 3. They shall be imposed upon and deluded by false Christs and false prophets, as our Saviour foretold, Matt. xxiv. 5. Many such there were, who by their seditious practices provoked the Romans, and hastened the ruin of the Jewish nation; but it is observable that they were never cheated by a counterfeit Messiah till they had refused and rejected the true Messiah. Now observe,

I. What a curse this foolish shepherd should be to the people, v. 16. God will, for their punishment, *raise up a foolish shepherd*, who will not do the duty of a shepherd; he will not *visit those that are cut off*, nor go after those that go astray, nor seek those that are missing, to find them out and bring them home, as the good shepherd does, Matt. xviii. 12, 13. Their shepherds take no care of the *young ones*, that need their care and are well worthy of it, as Christ does, Isa. xl. 11. They do not *heal that which was broken*, which was worried and torn, but let it die of its bruises, when a little thing, in time, would have saved it. They do not *feed* those who, through weakness, *stand still*, and are ready to faint, and cannot get forward, but leave them behind, let who will take them up; they do not *carry* that which *stands still* (so some read it); they never do any thing to *support the weak* and comfort the *feeble-minded*; but, on the contrary, 1. They are luxurious themselves: *They eat of the flesh of the fat*; they will have of the best for themselves; and, like that *wicked servant* that said, *My lord delays his coming, they eat and drink with the drunken, and serve their own bellies*. 2. They are barbarous to the flock. Their passions are as ill-governed as their appetites, for, when they are in a rage against any of the flock, they *tear their very claws in pieces* by overdriving them; they beat their hoofs; they *smite their fellow servants*. *Woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is such a child!*

II. What a curse this foolish shepherd should bring upon himself (v. 17): *Woe to the idol-shepherd*, who, like an idol, has eyes and sees not, who, like an idol, receives abundance of respect and homage from the people and the chief of their offerings but neither can nor will do them any kindness. He *leaves the flock* when they most need his

care, leaves them destitute, and flees, *because he is a hireling*; his doom is that *the sword of God's justice shall be upon his arm and his right eye*, so that he shall quite lose the use of both. *His arm shall wither and be dried up*, so that he who would not help his friends when it was required shall not know how to help himself; *his right eye shall be utterly darkened*, that he shall not discern the danger that his flock is in, nor know which way to look for relief. This was fulfilled when Christ said to the Pharisees, *I have come that those who see may be made blind*, John ix. 39. Those that have gifts which qualify them to do good, if they do not do good with them, shall be deprived of them; those that should have been workmen, but were slothful and would do nothing, will justly have their arm dried up; and those that should have been watchmen, but were sleepy and would never look about them, will justly have their eye blinded.

## CHAP. XII.

The apostle (Gal. iv. 25, 26) distinguishes between "Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children"—the remaining carcass of the Jewish church that rejected Christ, and "Jerusalem that is from above, that is free, and is the mother of us all"—the Christian church, the spiritual Jerusalem, which God has chosen to put his name there; in the foregoing chapter we read the doom of the former, and left that carcass to be a prey to the eagles that should be gathered to it. Now, in this chapter, we have the blessings of the latter, many precious promises made to the gospel-Jerusalem by him who (ver. 1) declares his power to make them good. It is promised, I. That the attempts of the church's enemies against her shall be to their own ruin, and they shall find that it is at their peril if they do her any hurt, ver. 2-4, 6. II. That the endeavours of the church's friends and patrons for her good shall be pious, regular, and successful, ver. 5. III. That God will protect and strengthen the meanest and weakest that belong to his church, and work salvation for them, ver. 7, 8. IV. That as a preparative for all this mercy, and a pledge of it, he will pour upon them a spirit of prayer and repentance, the effect of which shall be universal and very particular, ver. 9-14. These promises were of use then to the pious Jews that lived in the troublous times under Antiochus, and other persecutors and oppressors; and they are still to be improved in every age for the directing of our prayers and the encouraging of our hopes with reference to the gospel-church.

THE burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. 2 Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. 3 And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. 4 In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness: and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blind-



ness. 5 And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem *shall be* my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. 6 In that day will I make the governors of Judah like a hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, *even* in Jerusalem. 7 The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify *themselves* against Judah. 8 In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David *shall be* as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.

Here is, I. The title of this charter of promises made to God's Israel; it is the *burden of the word of the Lord*, a divine prediction; it is of weight in the delivery of it; it is to be pressed upon people, and will be very pressing in the accomplishment of it; it is a *burden*, a heavy burden, to all the church's enemies, like that *talent of lead*, ch. v. 7, 8. But it is *for Israel*; it is for their comfort and benefit. As even the *fiery law* (Deut. xxxiii. 2), so the fiery prophecies and fiery providences that come from God's right hand, come for them; the word that speaks terror to their enemies speaks peace to them, as the pillar of cloud and fire, which turned a bright side towards the Israelites, to direct and encourage them, but a black side towards the Egyptians, to terrify and dispirit them. Happy are those that have even the burdens of God's word for them, as well as the blessings of it.

II. The title of him that grants this charter, which is prefixed to it to show that he has both authority to make these promises and ability to make them good, for he is the Creator of the world and our Creator, and therefore has an incontestable irresistible dominion. 1. He *stretches out the heavens*; not only he did so at the first, when he said, *Let there be a firmament*, and he *made the firmament*, but he does so still; he keeps them stretched out *like a curtain*, keeps them from running in, and will do so till the end come, when *the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll*. No bounds can be set to his power who stretches out the heavens, nor can any thing be too hard for him. 2. He *lays the foundation of the earth*, and keeps it firm and

fixed on its own basis, or rather on its own axis, though it is *founded on the seas* (Ps. xxiv. 1, 2), nay, though it is *hung upon nothing*, Job. xxvi. 7. The founder of this earth is no doubt the ruler of it, and judges in it, and those deceive themselves who say, *The Lord has forsaken the earth*, for, if he had, it would have sunk, since it is he that not only did lay its foundations at first, but does still lay them, still uphold them. 3. He *forms the spirit of man within him*. He *made us these souls*, Jer. xxxviii. 16. He not only breathed into the first man, but still breathes into every man the breath of life; the body is derived from the *fathers of our flesh*, but the soul is infused by the *Father of spirits*, Heb. xii. 9. He *fashions men's hearts*: they are *in his hand*, and he turns them *as the rivers of water*, and casts them into what mould he pleases, so as to serve his own purposes with them; and he can therefore save his church by inspiring his friends and dispiriting his enemies, and will eternally save all his chosen by forming their spirits anew.

III. The promises themselves that are here made them, by which the church shall be secured, and in which all its friends may enjoy a holy security.

1. It is promised that, whatever attacks the enemies of the church may make upon her purity or peace, they will certainly issue in their own confusion. The enemies of God and of his kingdom bear a great deal of malice and ill-will to Jerusalem, and form designs for its destruction; but it will prove, at last, that they are but preparing ruin for themselves; Jerusalem is in safety, and those are in all the danger who fight against it. This is here illustrated by three comparisons:—

(1.) *Jerusalem shall be a cup of trembling* to all that lay siege to it, v. 2. They promise themselves that it shall be to them a cup of wine, which they shall easily and with pleasure drink off, and they thirst for its spoils, nay, they thirst for its blood, as for such a cup; but it shall prove a *cup of slumber*, nay, a *cup of poison*, to them, which, when they take it into their hands, and think it is all their own, they shall not be able to drink off: the fumes of it shall give them enough. When *the kings were assembled* against her, and saw how *God was known in her palaces for a refuge*, they *trembled and hasted away*; fear took hold upon them, as we find, Ps. xlviii. 3—6. Thus Alexander the Great was struck with amazement when he met Jaddus the high priest, and was deterred thereby from offering any violence to Jerusalem. When Sennacherib laid siege against Judah and Jerusalem he found them such a cup of stupifying wine as laid all his mighty men asleep, Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6. Some read it, *I will make Jerusalem a post of contrition or breaking*. Those that make any attempts upon Jerusalem do but run their heads

against a post, which they cannot move, but are sure to hurt themselves. The *blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall* (Isa. xxv. 4), broken by it, but not shaking it. God's church is a cup of consolation to all her friends (Isa. lxvi. 11), but a cup of trembling to all that would either debauch her by errors and corruptions or destroy her by wars and persecutions. See Isa. li. 22, 23.

(2.) *Jerusalem shall be a burdensome stone to all that attempt to remove it or carry it away, v. 3.* All the people of the earth are here supposed to be gathered together against it, some one time and some another; there has been a succession of enemies, from age to age, making war upon the church. But though they were all at once in a confederacy against it, and had formed a resolution to cut off the name of Israel, that it should be no more in remembrance (Ps. lxxxiii. 4), they will find it a task too hard for them. Those that are for keeping up and advancing the kingdom of sin in the world look upon Jerusalem, even the church of God, as the great obstacle to their designs, and they must have it out of the way; but they will find it heavier than they think it is; so that, [1.] They cannot remove it. God will have a church in the world, in spite of them; it is built upon a rock, and is as Mount Zion, that abides for ever, Ps. cxxv. 1. This stone, cut out of the mountain without hands, will not only keep its ground, but fill the earth, Dan. ii. 35. Nay, [2.] It will break in pieces all that burden themselves with it, as that stone smote the image, Dan. ii. 45. All that think themselves a match for it shall be cut in pieces by it. Some think it is an allusion to a sport which Jerome, upon this place, says was in use among the Jews, as among us: young men tried their strength, and strove for mastery, by heaving up great stones, which, if they proved too heavy for them, fell upon them, and bruised them. Those that make a jest of religion, and banter sacred things, will find them a burdensome stone, that it is ill-jesting with edged-tools, and though they make light of it (saying, *Am not I in sport?*) they bring upon themselves an insupportable sinking load of guilt. Our Saviour seems to allude to these words when he speaks of himself as a burdensome stone to those that will not have him for their foundation-stone, which shall fall upon them and grind them to powder, Matt. xxi. 44.

(3.) The governors of Judah shall be among their enemies like a hearth of fire among the wood, and a torch of fire in a sheaf, v. 6. Not that their own passions shall make them incendiaries and firebrands to all about them; no; Zion's King is meek and lowly, and all subordinate governors must be like him; but God's justice will make them avengers of his cause, and theirs, upon their enemies. Those that contend with them will find it is like an opposition given by briars and

thorns to a consuming fire, Isa. xxvii. 4. It will go through them, and burn them together. It is God's wrath, and not theirs, that is the fire which devours the adversaries. God's fire is said to be in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem, Isa. xxxi. 9. The enemies thought to be as water to this fire, to extinguish it and put it quite out; but God will make them as wood, nay, as a sheaf of corn (which is more combustible), to this fire, not only to be consumed by it, but to be made thereby to burn the more strongly. When God would make Abimelech and the men of Shechem one another's destroyers fire is said to come out from the one to devour the other, Judg. ix. 20. So here, Fire shall come out from the governors of Judah to devour all the people round about, as from the mouth of God's witnesses to consume those who offer to hurt them, Rev. xi. 5. The persecutors of the primitive church found this fulfilled in it, witness Lactantius's history of God's judgments upon the primitive persecutors, and the confession of Julian the apostate at last, *Thou hast overcome me, O thou Galilean!* The church's motto may be, *Nemo me impune lacesset—He that assails me does it at his peril.* If you are weary of your life, persecute the Christians, was once a proverb.

2. It is promised that God will infatuate the counsels and enfeeble the courage of the church's enemies (v. 4): "In that day, when the people of the earth are gathered together against Jerusalem, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness;" and again, "I will smite every horse of the people with blindness, so that they shall be no way serviceable to them; blinding the horses will be as bad as houghing them." The horses and their horsemen shall both forget the military exercise to which they were trained, and, instead of keeping ranks and observing the rules of their discipline, they shall both grow mad, and ruin themselves. The church's infantry shall be too hard for the enemy's cavalry; and those who were upbraided with trusting in horses shall be baffled by those who were forbidden to multiply horses.

3. It is promised that Jerusalem shall be re-peopled and replenished (v. 6): *Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.* The natives of Jerusalem shall not incorporate in a colony in some other country, and build a city there, and call that Jerusalem, and see the promises fulfilled in that, as those in New England called their towns by the names of towns in Old England. No; they shall have a new Jerusalem upon the same foundation, the same spot of ground, with the old one. They had so after their return out of captivity, but this was to have its full accomplishment in the gospel-church, which is a Jerusalem inhabited in its own place; for, the gospel being to be preached to all the world, it may call every place its own.



4. It is promised that the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be enabled to defend themselves, and yet shall be taken under the divine protection, *v. 8*. See here in what method God preserves his church, and those that are his, from the gates of hell to and through the gates of heaven. (1.) He does himself secure them: *In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, not only Jerusalem itself from being taken and destroyed, but every inhabitant of it from being any way damaged. God will not only be a *wall of fire* about the city, to fortify that, but he will encompass particular persons with his favour *as with a shield*, so that no dart of the besiegers shall touch them. (2.) He does it by giving them strength and courage to help themselves. What God works in his people by his grace contributes more to their preservation and defence than what he works for them by his providence. *The God of Israel gives strength and power to his people*, that they may do their part, and then he will not be wanting to do his. It is the glory of God to strengthen the weak, that most need his help, that see and own their need of it, and will be the most thankful for it. [1.] In that day the feeblest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem *shall be as David*, shall be men of war, as bold and brave, as skilful and strong, as David himself, shall attempt and accomplish great things, as David did, and become as serviceable to Jerusalem in guarding it as David himself was in founding it, and as formidable as he was to the enemies of it. See what divine grace does; it makes children not only men, but champions, makes weak saints to be not only good soldiers, but great soldiers, like David. And see how God often does his own work as easily and effectually, and more to his own glory, by weak and obscure instruments than by the most illustrious. [2.] *The house of David shall be as God*, that is, *as the angel of the Lord, before them*. Zerubbabel was now the top-branch of the house of David; he shall be endued with wisdom and grace for the service to which he is called, and shall go before the people as an angel, as that angel (so some think) which went before the people of Israel through the wilderness, which was God himself, *Exod. xxiii. 20*. God will increase the gifts and abilities both of the people and princes, in proportion to the respective services for which they are designed. It was said of David that he was *as an angel of God, to discern good and bad*, *2 Sam. xiv. 17*. Such shall the house of David now be. The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be as strong and fit for action as nature made David, and their magistrates as wise and fit for counsel as grace made him. But this was to have its full accomplishment in Christ; now the house of David looked little and mean, and its glory was eclipsed, but in Christ the house of

David shone more brightly than ever, and its countenance was as that of an angel; in him it became more blessed, and more a blessing, than ever it had been.

5. It is promised that there shall be a very good understanding between the city and the country, and that the balance shall be kept even between them; there shall be no mutual envies or jealousies between them; they shall not keep up any separate interests, but shall heartily unite in their counsels, and act in concert for the common good; and this happy agreement between the city and the country, the head and the body, is very necessary to the health, welfare, and safety of any nation. (1.) *The governors of Judah, the magistrates and gentry of the country, shall think honourably of the citizens, the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, the merchants and tradesmen; they shall not run them down, and contrive how to keep them under, but they shall say in their hearts, not in compliment, but in sincerity, *The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength*, the strength of my country, of my family, *in the Lord of hosts their God, v. 5*. They will therefore, upon all occasions, pay respect and deference to Jerusalem, as the mother-city, the ruling-city, and the city that is to be first served, because they look upon it to be the bulwark of the nation and its strongest fortification in times of public danger and distress, which therefore they would all come in to the assistance of and come under the protection of, and this not so much because it was a rich city, and money is the sinews of war, nor because it was a populous city and could bring the greatest numbers into the field, nor because its inhabitants were generally the most ingenious active men, the best soldiers and the best commanders (*of Zion it shall be said, This and that brave man were born there*), but because it was a *holy city*, where God's house and household, the temple and the priests, were, where his worship was kept up and his feasts were observed, and because it should now be more than ever a praying city, for *upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem God will pour a spirit of supplication (v. 10)*; therefore the governors of Judah shall say, *These are my strength*; they are so upon the account of their relation to, their interest in, and their communion with, *the Lord of hosts, their God*. Because *the Lord of hosts* is in a particular manner *their God* (for *in Salem is his tabernacle and his dwelling-place in Zion*), therefore *they shall be my strength*. Note, It is well with a kingdom when its great men know how to value its good men, when its governors look upon religion and religious people to be their strength, and consider it their interest to support them, and learn to call godly praying people, and skilful faithful ministers, *the chariots and horsemen of Israel*, as Joash called Elisha, and not the troublers of the land, as Ahab called Elijah. (2.) The court

and the city shall not despise, nor look with contempt upon, the inhabitants of the country; no, not the meanest of them, much less upon the governors of Judah; for God will put signal honour upon Judah, and so save them from the contempt of their brethren. As Jerusalem was dignified by special ordinances, so Judah shall be dignified with special providences. God says (v. 4), *I will open my eyes upon the house of Judah*, upon the poor country people. Proud men scornfully overlook them, but the great God will graciously look upon them and look after them. Nay (v. 7), *the Lord shall save the tents of Judah first*. Those that dwell in tents lie most exposed; but God will remarkably protect and deliver them before those that dwell in Jerusalem. He will appear glorious in what he does for the inhabitants of his villages in Israel, Judg. v. 11. Thus, in the mystical body, God gives more abundant honour to that part which lacked, that there may be no schism in the body (see 1 Cor. xii. 22—25), which is the reason here given why *the glory of the house of David*, which has great power, and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who have great wealth, and both which live in great pomp and pleasure, may not magnify themselves against Judah and the tents of Judah, the dwellers in which work hard, and fare hard, and perhaps are not so well bred. Note, Courtiers and citizens ought not to despise country people, nor look with disdain upon those whom God opens his eyes upon and who are first saved, while it is so hard for the rich and great to enter the kingdom of God. If God by his grace has magnified the dwellers in the tents of Judah, having chosen the weak and foolish things of the world and chosen to employ them, we affront him if we vilify them, or magnify ourselves against them, Jam. ii. 5, 6. This promise has a further reference to the gospel-church, in which no difference shall be made between high and low, rich and poor, bond and free, circumcision and uncircumcision, but all shall be alike welcome to Christ, and partake of his benefits, Col. iii. 11. Jerusalem shall not then be thought, as it had been, more holy than other parts of the land of Israel.

9 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem*. 10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. 11

In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. 12 And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; 13 The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; 14 All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

The day here spoken of is the day of Jerusalem's defence and deliverance, that glorious day when God will appear for the salvation of his people, which, if it do refer to the successes which the Jews had against their enemies in the time of the Maccabees, yet certainly looks further, to the *gospel-day*, to Christ's victories over the powers of darkness and the great salvation he has wrought for his chosen. Now we have here an account of two remarkable works designed in that day.

I. A glorious work of God to be wrought for his people: "*I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem*, v. 9. Nations come against Jerusalem, many and mighty nations; but they shall all be destroyed, their power shall be broken, and their attempts baffled; the mischief they intend shall return upon their own head." God will seek to destroy them, not as if he were at a loss for ways and means to bring it about (Infinite Wisdom was never non-plussed), but his seeking to do it intimates that he is very earnest and intent upon it (he is jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and has the *day of vengeance* in his heart) and that he overrules means and instruments, and all the motions and operations of second causes, in order to it. He is *framing evil* against them; when he seems to be setting them up he is seeking to destroy them. In Christ's first coming, he sought to destroy him that had the power of death, and did destroy him, bruised the serpent's head, and broke all the powers of darkness that fought against God's kingdom among men and against the faithful friends and subjects of that kingdom; he spoiled them, and made a show of them openly. In his second coming, he will complete their destruction, when he shall put down all opposing rule, principality, and power, and death itself shall be swallowed up in that victory. The last enemy shall be destroyed of all that fought against Jerusalem.

II. A gracious work of God to be wrought in his people, in order to the work that is to be wrought for them. When he seeks to destroy their enemies he will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication. Note,



When God intends great mercy for his people the first thing he does is to set them a praying; thus he seeks to destroy their enemies by stirring them up to seek to him that he would do it for them; because, though he has proposed it and promised it, and it is for his own glory to do it, yet he will for *this be enquired of by the house of Israel*, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. *Ask, and it shall be given.* This honour will he have to himself, and this honour will he put upon prayer and upon praying people. And it is a happy presage to the distressed church of deliverance approaching, and is, as it were, the dawning of its day, when his people are stirred up to cry mightily to him for it. But this promise has reference to, and is performed in, the graces of the Spirit given to all believers, as that Isa. xlv. 3, *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed*, which was fulfilled when *Jesus was glorified*, John vii. 39. It is a promise of the Spirit, and with him of all *spiritual blessings in heavenly things by Christ*. Now observe here,

1. On whom these blessings are poured out. (1.) *On the house of David*, on the great men; for they are no more, and no better, than the grace of God makes them. It was promised (v. 8) that *the house of David* should be as *the angel of the Lord*. Now, in order to that, the Spirit of grace is poured upon them; for the more the saints have of the Spirit of grace the more like they are to the holy angels. When God was about to appear for the land, he poured his Spirit of grace upon the house of David, the leading men of the land. It bodes well to a people when princes and great men go before the rest in that which is good, as 2 Chron. xx. 5. The house of David is all summed up in Jesus Christ, *the Son of David*; and upon him, as the head, the Spirit of grace is poured out, from him to be diffused to all his members; *from his fulness we receive, and grace for grace.* (2.) *On the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, the common people; for the operations of the Spirit are the same upon the mean and weak Christians that they are upon the strong and more grown. The inhabitants of Jerusalem cannot influence public affairs by their powers and policies, as the great men of the house of David may, yet they may do good service by their prayers, and therefore upon them the Spirit shall be poured out. The church is Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem; all true believers, that have their conversation in heaven, are inhabitants of this Jerusalem, and to them this promise belongs. God will *pour his Spirit upon them*. This is the earnest which all that *believe in Christ* shall receive; thus they are sanctified; thus they are sealed.

2. What these blessings are: *I will pour upon them the Spirit*. That includes all good things, as it qualifies us for the favour of God, and all his other gifts. He will pour

out the Spirit, (1.) As a *Spirit of grace*, to sanctify us and to make us gracious. (2.) As a *Spirit of supplications*, inclining us to, instructing and assisting us in, the duty of prayer. Note, Wherever the Spirit is given as a Spirit of grace, he is given as a Spirit of sanctification. Wherever he is a Spirit of adoption, he *teaches to cry, Abba, Father*. As soon as ever Paul was converted, *Behold, he prays*, Acts ix. 11. You may as soon find a living man without breath as a living saint without prayer. There is a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of prayer now under the gospel than was under the law; and the further the work of sanctification is carried in us the better is the work of supplication carried on by us.

3. What the effect of them will be: *I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace*. One would think that it should follow, "And they shall look on him whom they have believed, and shall rejoice" (and it is true that that is one of the fruits of the pouring out of the Spirit, whence we read of *the joy of the Holy Ghost*), but it follows, *They shall mourn*; for there is a holy mourning, that is the effect of the pouring out of the Spirit, a mourning for sin, which is of use to quicken faith in Christ and qualify for joy in God. It is here made the matter of a promise that they shall mourn, for there is a mourning that will end in rejoicing and has a blessing entailed upon it. This mourning is a fruit of the Spirit of grace, an evidence of a work of grace in the soul, and a companion of the Spirit of supplication, as it expresses lively affections working in prayer; hence prayers and tears are often put together, 2 Kings xx. 5. Jacob, that wrestler with God, *wept and made supplication*. But here it is a mourning for sin that is the effect of the pouring out of the Spirit.

(1.) It is a mourning grounded upon a sight of Christ: *They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him*. Here, [1.] It is foretold that Christ should be pierced, and this scripture is quoted as that which was fulfilled when Christ's side was pierced upon the cross; see John xix. 37. [2.] He is spoken of as one whom we have pierced; it is spoken primarily of the Jews, who persecuted him to death (and we find that *those who pierced him* are distinguished from the other *kindreds of the earth* that shall *wail because of him*, Rev. i. 7); yet it is true of us all as sinners, we have pierced Christ, inasmuch as our sins were the cause of his death, for he was *wounded for our transgressions*, and they are the *grief of his soul*; he is *broken with the whorish heart of sinners, who therefore* are said to *crucify him afresh* and put him to open shame. [3.] Those that truly repent of sin look upon Christ as one whom they have pierced, who was pierced for their sins and is pierced by them; and this engages them to *look unto him*, as those that are deeply



concerned for him. [4.] This is the effect of their looking to Christ; it makes them mourn. This was particularly fulfilled in those to whom Peter preached Christ crucified; when they heard it those who had had a hand in piercing him were *pricked to the heart*, and cried out, *What shall we do?* It is fulfilled in all those who sorrow for sin after a godly sort; they look to Christ, and *mourn for him*, not so much for his sufferings as for their own sins that procured them. Note, The genuine sorrows of a penitent soul flow from the believing sight of a pierced Saviour. Looking by faith upon the cross of Christ will set us a mourning for sin after a godly sort.

(2.) It is a great mourning. [1.] It is like the mourning of a parent for the death of a beloved child. They shall mourn for sin *as one mourns for an only son*, in whose grave the hopes of his family are buried, and shall be inwardly in *bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born*, as the Egyptians were when there was a cry throughout all their land for the death of their first-born. The sorrow of children for the death of their parents is sometimes counterfeited, is often small, and soon wears off and is forgotten; but the sorrow of parents for a child, for a son, for an only son, for a first-born, is natural, sincere, unforced, and unaffected, it is secret and lasting; such are the sorrows of a true penitent, flowing purely from love to Christ above any other. [2.] It is like the mourning of a people for the death of a wise and good prince. It shall be *like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon*, where good king Josiah was slain, for whom there was a general lamentation (v. 11), and perhaps the greater because they were told that it was their sin that provoked God to deprive them of so great a blessing; therefore they cried out, *The crown has fallen from our head. Woe unto us, for we have sinned!* Lam. v. 16. Christ is our King; our sins were his death, and, for that reason, ought to be our grief.

(3.) It is a general universal mourning (v. 12): *The land shall mourn*. The land itself put on mourning at the death of Christ, for there was then *darkness over all the land*, and the earth trembled; but this is a promise that, in consideration of the death of Christ, multitudes shall be effectually brought to sorrow for sin and turn to God; it shall be such a universal gracious mourning as was when *all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord*, 1 Sam. vii. 2. Some think this is yet to have its complete accomplishment in the general conversion of the Jewish nation.

(4.) It is also a private particular mourning. There shall be not only a mourning of *the land*, by its representatives in a general assembly (as Judg. ii. 5, when the place was called *Bochim—A place of weepers*), but it shall spread itself into all corners of the land: *Every family apart shall mourn* (v.

12), *all the families that remain*, v. 14. All have contributed to the guilt, and therefore all shall share in the grief. Note, The exercises of devotion should be performed by private families among themselves, besides their joining in public assemblies for religious worship. National fasts must be observed, not only in our synagogues, but in our houses. In the mourning here foretold the wives mourn apart by themselves, in their own apartment, as Esther and her maids. And some think it intimates their denying themselves the use even of lawful delights in a time of general humiliation, 1 Cor. vii. 5. Four several families are here specified as examples to others in this mourning:—[1.] Two of them are royal families; the *house of David*, in Solomon, and the *house of Nathan*, another son of David, brother to Solomon, from whom Zerubbabel descended, as appears by Christ's genealogy, Luke iii. 27—31. The house of David, particularly that of Nathan, which is now the chief branch of that house, shall go before in this good work. The greatest princes must not think themselves exempted from the law of repentance, but rather obliged most solemnly to express it, for the exciting of others, as Hezekiah humbled himself (2 Chron. xxxii. 26), the princes and the king (2 Chron. xii. 6), and the king of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 6. [2.] Two of them are sacred families (v. 13), the *family of the house of Levi*, which was God's tribe, and in it particularly the family of Shimei, which was a branch of the tribe of Levi (1 Chron. vi. 17), and probably some of the descendants of that family were now of note for preachers to the people or ministers to the altar. As the princes must mourn for the sins of the magistracy, so must the priests for the *iniquity of the holy things*. In times of general tribulation and humiliation the Lord's ministers are concerned to *weep between the porch and the altar* (Joel ii. 17), and not only there, but in their houses apart; for in what families should godliness, both in the form and in the power of it, be found, if not in ministers' families?

#### CHAP. XIII.

In this chapter we have, I. Some further promises relating to gospel-times. Here is a promise of the remission of sins (ver. 1), or the reformation of manners (ver. 2), and particularly of the convicting and slaying of false prophets, ver. 2—6. II. A clear prediction of the sufferings of Christ and the dispersion of his disciples thereupon (ver. 7), of the destruction of the greater part of the Jewish nation not long after (ver. 8), and of the purifying of a remnant of them, a peculiar people to God, ver. 9.

**I**N that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. 2 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land*, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to



pass out of the land. 3 And it shall come to pass, *that* when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. 4 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: 5 But he shall say, *I am* no prophet, *I am* a husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. 6 And *one* shall say unto him, What *are* these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, *Those* with which I was wounded *in* the house of my friends.

Behold the Lamb of God *taking away the sin of the world*, the sin of the church; for *therefore* was the Son of God manifested, to *take away our sin*, 1 John iii. 5.

I. He takes away the guilt of sin by the blood of his cross (v. 1): *In that day*, in the gospel-day, *there shall be a fountain opened*, that is, provision made for the cleansing of all those from the pollutions of sin who truly repent and are sorry for them. *In that day*, when the Spirit of grace is poured out to set them a mourning for their sins, they shall not mourn as those who have no hope, but they shall have their sins pardoned, and the comfort of their pardon in their bosoms. Their consciences shall be purified and pacified by the *blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin*, 1 John i. 7. For Christ is exalted to give both repentance and remission of sins; and where he gives the one no doubt he gives the other. This *fountain opened* is the pierced side of Jesus Christ, spoken of just before (ch. xii. 10), for thence came there out *blood and water*, and both for cleansing. And those who *look upon Christ pierced*, and mourn for their sins that pierced him, and are therefore in bitterness for him, may look again upon Christ pierced and rejoice in him, because it pleased the Lord thus to smite this rock, that it might be to us a *fountain of living waters*. See here, 1. How we are polluted; we are all so; we have sinned, and sin is uncleanness; it defiles the mind and conscience, renders us odious to God and uneasy in ourselves, unfit to be employed in the service of God and admitted into communion with him, as those who were ceremonially unclean were shut out of the sanctuary. The *house of David* and the *inhabitants of Jerusalem* are under sin, which is uncleanness. The truth is, we are all *as an unclean*

*thing*, and deserve to have our portion with the unclean. 2. How we may be purged. Behold, there is a fountain opened for us to wash in, and there are streams flowing to us from that fountain, so that, if we be not made clean, it is our own fault. The blood of Christ, and God's pardoning mercy in that blood, revealed in the new covenant, are, (1.) A fountain; for there is in them an inexhaustible fulness. There is mercy enough in God, and merit enough in Christ, for the forgiving of the greatest sins and sinners, upon gospel-terms. *Such were some of you, but you are washed*, 1 Cor. vi. 11. Under the law there were a brazen laver and a brazen sea to wash in; those were but vessels, but we have a fountain to ourselves, overflowing, ever-flowing. (2.) A *fountain opened*; for, whoever will, may come and take the benefit of it: it is opened, not only to the *house of David*, but to the *inhabitants of Jerusalem*, to the poor and mean as well as to the rich and great; or it is opened for all believers, who, as the spiritual seed of Christ, are of the house of David, and, as living members of the church, are inhabitants of Jerusalem. Through Christ all that believe are justified, are *washed from their sins in his blood*, that they may be made to our God *kings and priests*, Rev. i. 5, 6.

II. He takes away the dominion of sin by the power of his grace, even of beloved sins. This evermore accompanies the former; those that are washed in the fountain opened, as they are justified, so they are sanctified; the water came with the blood out of the pierced side of Christ. It is here promised that in that day, 1. Idolatry shall be quite abolished and the people of the Jews shall be effectually cured of their inclination to it (v. 2): *I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land*. The worship of the idols of their fathers shall be so perfectly rooted out that in one generation or two it shall be forgotten that ever there were such idols among them; they shall either not be named at all or not with any respect; *they shall no more be remembered*, as was promised, Hos. ii. 17. This was fulfilled in the rooted aversion which the Jews had, after the captivity, to idols and idolatry, and still retain to this day; it was fulfilled also in the ready conversion of many to the faith of Christ, by which they were taken off from making an idol of the ceremonial law, as the unbelieving Jews did; and it is still in the fulfilling when souls are brought off from the world and the flesh, those two great idols, that they may cleave to God only. 2. False prophecy shall also be brought to an end: *I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit*, the prophets that are under the influence of the unclean spirit, to *pass out of the land*. The devil is an *unclean spirit*; sin and uncleanness are from him; he has his prophets, that serve his interests and receive their instructions from him. Take away the unclean spirit, and the

prophets would not deceive as they do; take away the false prophets that produce sham commissions, and the unclean spirit could not do the mischief he does. When God designs the silencing of the false prophets he banishes the unclean spirit out of the land, that wrought in them, and was a rival with him for the throne in the heart. The church of the Jews, when they were addicted to idols, did also dote much upon false prophets, who flattered them in their sins with promises of impunity and peace; but here it is promised, as a blessed effect of the promised reformation, that they should be very much set against false prophets, and zealous to clear the land of them; they were so after the captivity, till, through the blindness of their zeal against false prophets, they had put Christ to death under that character, and, after that, there arose many *false Christs and false prophets, and deceived many*, Matt. xxiv. 11. It is here foretold, (1.) That false prophets, instead of being indulged and favoured, should be brought to condign punishment even by their nearest relations, which would be as great an instance as any of flagrant zeal against those deceivers (v. 3): *When any shall set up for a prophet, and shall speak lies in the name of the Lord, shall preach that which tends to draw people from God and to confirm them in sin, his own parents shall be the first and most forward to prosecute him for it, according to the law.* Deut. xiii. 6—11, "*If thy son entice thee secretly from God, thou shalt surely kill him. Show thy indignation against him, and prevent any further temptation from him.*" His father and his mother shall thrust him through when he prophesies. Note, We ought to conceive, and always to retain, a very great detestation and dread of every thing that would draw us out of the way of our duty into by-paths, as those who cannot bear that which is evil, Rev. ii. 2. And holy zeal for God and godliness will make us hate sin, and dread temptation, most in those whom naturally we love best, and who are nearest to us; there our danger is greatest, as Adam's from Eve, Job's from his wife; and there it will be the most praiseworthy to show our zeal, as Levi, who, in the cause of God, did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children, Deut. xxxiii. 9. Thus we must hate and forsake our nearest relations when they come in competition with our duty to God, Luke xiv. 26. Natural affections, even the strongest, must be overruled by gracious affections. (2.) That false prophets should be themselves convinced of their sin and folly, and let fall their pretensions (v. 4): "*The prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision; they shall not repeat it, or insist upon it, but desire that it may be forgotten and no more said of it, being ready themselves to own it was a sham, because God has by his grace awakened their consciences and shown them their error, or*

because the event disproves their predictions, and gives them the lie, or because their prophecies do not meet with such a favourable reception as they used to meet with, but are generally despised and distasted; they perceive the people ashamed of them, which makes them begin to be ashamed of themselves. And therefore they shall no longer wear a rough garment, or garment of hair, as the true prophets used to do, in imitation of Elijah, and in token of their being mortified to the pleasures and delights of sense." The pretenders had appeared in the habit of true prophets; but, their folly being now made manifest, they shall lay it aside, no more to deceive and impose upon unthinking unwary people by it. A modest dress is a very good thing, if it be the genuine indication of a humble heart, and is to instruct; but it is a bad thing if it be the hypocritical disguise of a proud ambitious heart, and is to deceive. Let men be really as good as they seem to be, but not seem to be better than really they are. This pretender, as a true penitent, [1.] Shall undeceive those whom he had imposed upon: *He shall say, "I am no prophet, as I have pretended to be, was never designed nor set apart to the office, never educated nor brought up for it, never conversant among the sons of the prophets. I am a husbandman, and was bred to that business; I was never taught of God to prophesy, but taught of man to keep cattle."* Amos was originally such a one too, and yet was afterwards called to be a prophet, Amos vii. 14, 15. But this deceiver never had any such call. Note, Those who sorrow after a godly sort for their having deceived others will be forward to confess their sin, and will be so just as to rectify the mistakes which they have been the cause of. Thus those who had used *curious arts*, when they were converted *showed their deeds*, and by what fallacies they had cheated the people, Acts xix. 18. [2.] He shall return to his own proper employment, which is the fittest for him: *I will be a husbandman (so it may be read); "I will apply myself to my calling again, and meddle no more with things that belong not to me; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth, and cattle I will again keep, and never set up for a preacher any more."* Note, When we are convinced that we have gone out of the way of our duty we must evince the truth of our repentance by returning to it again, though it be the severest mortification to us. [3.] He shall acknowledge those to be his friends who by a severe discipline were instrumental to bring him to a sight of his error, v. 6. When he who with the greatest assurance had asserted himself so lately to be a prophet suddenly drops his claims, and says, I am no prophet, every body will be surprised at it, and some will ask, "*What are these wounds, or marks of stripes, in thy hands?*" How camest thou by them? Hast thou not been *examined by scourging?* And



is not that it that has brought thee to thyself?" (*Vexatio dat intellectum—Vexation sharpens the intellect.*) "Hast thou not been beaten into this acknowledgment? Was it not the rod and reproof that gave thee this wisdom?" And he shall own, "Yes, it was; these are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends, who bound me, and used me hardly and severely, as a distracted man, and so brought me to my senses." By this it appears that those parents of the false prophet that thrust him through (v. 3) did not do it till they had first tried to reclaim him by correction, and he would not be reclaimed; for so was the law concerning a disobedient son—his parents must first have chastened him in vain before they were allowed to bring him forth to be stoned, Deut. xxi. 18, 19. But here is another who was reduced by stripes, and so prevented the capital punishment; and he had the sense and honesty to own that they were his friends, his real friends, who thus wounded him, that they might reclaim him; for faithful are the wounds of a friend, Prov. xxvii. 6. Some good interpreters, observing how soon this comes after the mention of Christ's being pierced, think that these are the words of that great prophet, not of the false prophet spoken of before. Christ was wounded in his hands, when they were nailed to the cross, and, after his resurrection, he had the marks of these wounds; and here he tells how he came by them; he received them as a false prophet, for the chief priests called him a deceiver, and upon that account would have him crucified; but he received them in the house of his friends—the Jews, who should have been his friends; for he came to his own, and, though they were his bitter enemies, yet he was pleased to call them his friends, as he did Judas (*Friend, wherefore hast thou come?*) because they forwarded his sufferings for him; as he called Peter Satan—an adversary, because he dissuaded him from them.

7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. 8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. 9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Here is a prophecy,

I. Of the sufferings of Christ, of him who was to be pierced, and was to be the fountain opened. *Awake, O sword! against my Shepherd, v. 7.* These are the words of God the Father, giving order and commission to the sword of his justice to awake against his Son, when he had voluntarily made his soul an offering for sin; for it pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief; and he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, Isa. liii. 4, 10. Observe, 1. How he calls him. "As God, he is my fellow;" for he thought it no robbery to be equal with God. He and the Father are one. He was from eternity by him, as one brought up with him, and, in the work of man's redemption, he was his elect, in whom his soul delighted, and the counsel of peace was between them both. "As Mediator, he is my Shepherd, that great and good Shepherd that undertook to feed the flock," ch. xi. 7. He is the Shepherd that was to lay down his life for the sheep. 2. How he uses him: *Awake, O sword! against him.* If he will be a sacrifice, he must be slain, for without the shedding of blood, the life-blood, there was no remission. Men thrust him through as a foolish shepherd; God thrust him through as the good Shepherd (compare v. 3), that he might purchase the flock of God with his own blood, Acts xx. 28. It is not a charge given to a rod to correct him, but to a sword to slay him; for Messiah the prince must be cut off, but not for himself, Dan. ix. 26. It is not the sword of war that receives this charge, that he may die in the bed of honour, but the sword of justice, that he may die as a criminal, upon an ignominious tree. This sword must awake against him; he having no sin of his own to answer for, the sword of justice had nothing to say to him of itself, till, by particular order from the Judge of all, it was warranted to brandish itself against him. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, in the decree and counsel of God; but the sword designed against him had long slumbered, till now at length it is called upon to awake, not, "Awake, and frighten him," but, "Awake, and smite him; strike home; not with a drowsy blow, but an awakened one;" for God spared not his own Son.

II. Of the dispersion of the disciples thereupon: *Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.* This our Lord Jesus himself declares to have been fulfilled when all his disciples were offended because of him in the night wherein he was betrayed; Matt. xxvi. 31; Mark xiv. 27. They all forsook him and fled. The smiting of the Shepherd is the scattering of the sheep. They were scattered every one to his own, and left him alone, John xvi. 32. Herein they were like timorous sheep; yet the Shepherd thus provided for their safety, for he said, *If you seek me, let these go their way.* Some make another application of this; Christ was the Shepherd of

the Jewish nation; he was smitten; they themselves smote him, and therefore they were justly scattered abroad, and dispersed among the nations, and remain so at this day. These words, *I will turn my hand upon the little ones*, may be understood either as a threatening (as Christ suffered, so shall his disciples, they shall *drink of the cup that he drank of* and be *baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with*) or as a promise that God would gather Christ's scattered disciples together again, and he should give them the meeting in Galilee. Though the little ones among Christ's soldiers may be dispersed, they shall rally again; the lambs of his flock, though frightened by the beasts of prey, shall recover themselves, shall be gathered in his arms and laid in his bosom. Sometimes, when the sheep are scattered and lost in the wilderness, yet the little ones, which, it was feared, would be a prey (Num. xiv. 31), are brought in, are brought home, and God turns his hand upon them.

III. Of the rejection and ruin of the unbelieving Jews (v. 8); and this word has, and shall have, its accomplishment, in the destruction of the corrupt and hypocritical part of the church. *It shall come to pass that in all the land of Israel two parts shall be cut off and die.* The Roman army laid the country waste, and slew at least two-thirds of the Jews. Some understand by the *cutting off*, and *dying*, of *two parts* in all the earth, the abolishing of heathenism and Judaism, that Christianity, the third part, might be left to reign alone. The Jewish worship was quite taken away by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And, some time after, Pagan idolatry was in a manner extirpated, when the empire became Christian.

IV. Of the reformation and preservation of the chosen remnant, those of them that believed, and the Christian church in general (v. 9): *The third part shall be left.* When Jerusalem and Judea were destroyed, all the Christians in that country, having among them the warning Christ gave them to *flee to the mountains*, shifted for their own safety, and were sheltered in a city called *Pella*, on the other side Jordan. We have here first the trials and then the triumphs of the Christian church, and of all the faithful members of it. 1. Their trials: *I will bring that third part through the fire of affliction, and will refine and try them as silver and gold are refined and tried.* This was fulfilled in the persecutions of the primitive church, the *fiery trial* which tried the people of God then, 1 Pet. iv. 12. Those whom God sets apart for himself must pass through a probation and purification in this world; they must be *tried that their faith may be found to praise and honour* (1 Pet. i. 6, 7), as Abraham's faith was when it was tried by the command given him to offer up Isaac, *Now know I that thou fearest me.* They must be tried, that both those that are perfect and

those that are not may be *made manifest.* They must be refined from their dross; their corruption must be purged out; they must be brightened and bettered. 2. Their triumphs. (1.) Their communion with God is their triumph: *They shall call on my name, and I will hear them.* They write to God by prayer, and receive from him answers of peace, and thus keep up a comfortable communion with him. *This honour have all his saints.* (2.) Their covenant with God is their triumph: *"I will say, It is my people, whom I have chosen and loved, and will own; and they shall say, The Lord is my God, and a God all-sufficient to me; and in me they shall boast every day and all the day long. This God is our God for ever and ever."*

## CHAP. XIV.

Divers things were foretold, in the two foregoing chapters, which should come to pass "in that day;" this chapter speaks of a "day of the Lord that cometh," a day of his judgment, and ten times in the foregoing chapters, and seven times in this, it is repeated, "in that day;" but what that day is that is here meant is uncertain, and perhaps will be so (as the Jews speak) till Elias comes; whether it refer to the whole period of time from the prophet's days to the days of the Messiah, or to some particular events in that time, or to Christ's coming, and the setting up of his kingdom upon the ruins of the Jewish polity, we cannot determine, but divers passages here seem to look as far forward as gospel-times. Now the "day of the Lord" brings with it both judgment and mercy, mercy to his church, judgment to her enemies and persecutors. I. The gates of hell are here threatening the church (ver. 1, 2) and yet not prevailing. II. The power of Heaven appears here for the church and against the enemies of it, ver. 3, 5. III. The events concerning the church are here represented as mixed (ver. 6, 7), but issuing well at last. IV. The spreading of the means of knowledge is here foretold, and the setting up of the gospel-kingdom in the world (ver. 8, 9), which shall be the enlargement and establishment of another Jerusalem, ver. 10, 11. V. Those shall be reckoned with that fought against Jerusalem (ver. 12-15) and those that neglect his worship there, ver. 17-19. VI. It is promised that there shall be great resort to the church, and great purity and plenty in it, ver. 16, 20, 21.

**BEHOLD**, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle: and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. 4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. 5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach



unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, *and* all the saints with thee. 6 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the light shall not be clear, *nor* dark: 7 But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, *that* at evening time it shall be light.

God's providences concerning his church are here represented as strangely changing and strangely mixed.

1. As strangely changing. Sometimes the tide runs high and strong against them, but presently it turns, and comes to be in favour of them; and God has, for wise and holy ends, set the one over against the other.

1. God here appears against Jerusalem; judgment begins at the house of God. When the day of the Lord comes (v. 1) Jerusalem must pass through the fire to be refined. God himself gathers all nations against Jerusalem to battle (v. 2); he gives them a charge, as he did Sennacherib, to take the spoil and to take the prey (Isa. x. 6), for the people of Jerusalem have now become the people of his wrath. And who can stand before him or before nations gathered by him? Where he gives commission he will give success. The city shall be taken by the Romans, who have nations at command; the houses shall be rifled, and all the riches of them taken away, by the enemy; and, to gratify an insatiable lust of uncleanness as well as avarice, the women shall be ravished, as if victory were a license to the worst of villanies, *jusque datum scelcri—and crimes were sanctioned by law.* One-half of the city shall then be carried into captivity, to be sold or enslaved, and shall not be able to help itself, such is the destruction that shall be made in the great and terrible day of the Lord.

2. He presently changes his way, and appears for Jerusalem; for, though judgment begin at the house of God, yet, as it shall not end there, so it shall not make a full end there, Jer. iv. 27; xxx. 11.

(1.) A remnant shall be spared, the same with that third part spoken of, ch. xiii. 8. One-half shall go into captivity, whence they may hereafter be fetched back, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off, as one would have feared, from the city. Many of the Jews shall receive the gospel, and so shall prevent their being cut off from the city of God, his church upon earth. In it shall be a tenth, Isa. vi. 13; See Ezek. v. 3.

(2.) Their cause shall be pleaded against their enemies (v. 3): Then, when God has made use of these nations as a scourge to his people, he shall go forth and fight against them by his judgments, as when he fought

against the enemies of his church formerly in the day of battle, with the Egyptians, Canaanites, and others. Note, The instruments of God's wrath will themselves be made the objects of it; for it will come to their turn to drink of the cup of trembling; and whom God fights against he will be sure to overcome and be too hard for. And every former day of battle, which God has made to his people a day of triumph, as it is an engagement to God to appear for his people, because he is the same, so it is an encouragement to them to trust in him. It is observable that the Roman empire never flourished after the destruction of Jerusalem as it had done before, but in many instances God fought against it.

(3.) Though Jerusalem and the temple be destroyed, yet God will have a church in the world, into which Gentiles shall be admitted, and with whom the believing Jews shall be incorporated, v. 4, 5. These verses are dark and hard to be understood; but divers good expositors take this to be the meaning of them. [1.] God will carefully inspect Jerusalem, even then when the enemies of it are laying it waste: *His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives*, whence he may take a full view of the city and temple, Mark xiii. 3. When the refiner puts his gold into the furnace he stands by it, and has his eye upon it, to see that it receive no damage; so when Jerusalem, God's gold, is to be refined, he will have the oversight of it. He will stand by upon the mount of Olives; this was literally fulfilled when our Lord Jesus was often upon this mountain, especially when thence he ascended up into heaven, Acts i. 12. It was the last place on which his feet stood on this earth, the place from which he took rise. [2.] The partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles shall be taken away. The mountains about Jerusalem, and particularly this, signified it to be an enclosure, and that it stood in the way of those who would approach to it. Between the Gentiles and Jerusalem this mountain of Be-ther, of division, stood, Cant. ii. 17. But by the destruction of Jerusalem this mountain shall be made to cleave in the midst, and so the Jewish pale shall be taken down, and the church laid in common with the Gentiles, who were made one with the Jews by the breaking down of this middle wall of partition, Eph. ii. 14. *Who art thou, O great mountain?* And a great mountain the ceremonial law was in the way of the Jews' conversion, which, one would think, could never have been got over; yet before Christ and his gospel it was made plain. This mountain departs, this hill removes, but the covenant of peace cannot be broken; for peace is still preached to him that is afar off and to those that are nigh. [3.] A new and living way shall be opened to the new Jerusalem, both to see it and to come into it. The mountain being divided, one-half towards

the north and the other half towards the south, there shall be a *very great valley*, that is, a broad way of communication opened between Jerusalem and the Gentile world, by which the Gentiles shall have free admission into the gospel-Jerusalem, and the word of the Lord, that *goes forth from Jerusalem*, shall have a *free course* into the Gentile world. Thus the *way of the Lord* is prepared, for *every mountain and hill shall be brought low*, and plain and pleasant valleys shall come in the room of them, Isa. xl. 4. [4.] Those of the Jews that believe shall come in, and join themselves to the Gentiles, and incorporate with them in the gospel-church: *You shall flee to the valley of the mountains*, that valley that is opened between the divided halves of the mount of Olives; they shall hasten into the church with the Gentiles, as formerly the Gentiles with them, ch. viii. 23. The *valley of the mountains* is the gospel-church, to which there were added of the Jews daily *such as should be saved*, who fled to that valley as to their refuge. This *valley of the mountains* is said to *reach unto Azal*, or to the *separate place*, that is, to all those whom God has *set apart for himself*. When God *makes his mountains a way* (Isa. xlix. 11), by making them a valley, the way shall be opened to all the *way-faring men* (Isa. xxxv. 8), and, *though fools*, they shall not err therein. Or, to those that are now separated from God this valley shall reach; for the Gentiles, who are afar off, shall be made nigh, with the Jews, who are a *people near unto him*, and both have an access, a mutual access to each other and a joint access to God as a Father by one Spirit, Eph. ii. 18. [5.] They shall flee to the *valley of the mountains*, to the gospel-church, under dreadful apprehensions of their danger from the curse of the law. They shall *flee from the wrath to come*, from the avenger of blood, who is in pursuit of them, to the church as to a *city of refuge*, or as *doves to their windows*, as they *fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah*, Amos. i. 1. Therefore the gospel reveals the wrath of God from heaven (Rom. i. 18) that we might be awakened to *escape for our lives*, to flee as from an earthquake, for we feel the earth ready to sink under us, and we can find no firm footing in it, and therefore must flee to Christ, in whom alone we can stand fast and be easy.

(4.) God shall appear in his glory for the accomplishing of all this: *The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee*, which may refer to his coming to destroy Jerusalem, or to destroy the enemies of Jerusalem, or his coming to set up his kingdom in the world, which is called the *coming of the Son of man* (Matt. xxiv. 37), or to his last coming, at the end of time; however, it teaches us, [1.] That the Lord will come; it has been the faith of all the saints, *Behold, the Lord comes* to fulfil every word that he has spoken

in its season. [2.] When he comes all his saints come with him; they attend his motions and are ready to serve his interests. Christ will come at the end of time with *ten thousands of his saints*, as when he came to give the law upon Mount Sinai. [3.] Every particular believer, being related to God as his God, may triumph in the expectation of his coming and speak of it with pleasure. *The Lord my God shall come*, shall come to the comfort of all that are his; for, "Blessed Lord, *all the saints shall be with thee*, and it shall be their everlasting happiness to dwell in thy presence; and therefore *come, Lord Jesus*." And some think that this may be read as a prayer, *Yet, O Lord my God! come, and bring all the saints with thee*.

II. God's providences appear here strangely mixed (v. 6, 7): *In that day of the Lord the light shall not be clear nor dark, not day nor night; but at evening time it shall be light*. Some refer this to all the time from hence to the coming of the Messiah; the Jewish church had neither perfect peace nor constant trouble, but a cloudy day, neither rain nor sunshine. But it may be taken more generally, as designed to represent the method God usually takes in the administration of the kingdom both of providence and grace. Here is, 1. An idea of the usual course and tenour of God's dispensations; the day of his grace and the day of his providence are *neither clear nor dark, not day nor night*. It is so with the church of God in this world; where the Sun of righteousness has risen it cannot be dark night, and yet short of heaven it will not be clear day. It is so with particular saints; they are not darkness, but *light in the Lord*, and yet, while there is so much error and corruption remaining in them, it is not perfect day. So it is as to the providences of God that relate to his church; in general the affairs of the church are neither good nor bad in any extremity, but there is a mixture of both; we are singing both of mercy and judgment, and are uncertain which will prevail, whether it be an evening or a morning twilight. We are between hope and fear, not knowing what to make of things. 2. An intimation of comfort with reference hereunto: *It shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord*. This intimates, (1.) The beauty and harmony of such mixed events; there is one and the same design and tendency in all; all the wheels make but one wheel, all the revolutions but one day. (2.) The brevity of them; it is, as it were, but for one day, for a little moment; the cloud that darkens the light will soon blow over. (3.) The eye God has upon all these events, and the hand he has in them all; they are *known to the Lord*; he takes notice of them, and orders and disposes of all for the best, according to the counsel of his will. 3. An issue very joyful secured at last: *At evening-time it shall be light*; it shall be clear light, and no longer dark;



we are sure of it in the other world, and we hope for it in this world—at *evening-time*, when our hopes are quite spent with waiting all day to no purpose, nay, when we fear it will be quite dark, when things are at the worst and the case of the church is most deplorable. As to the church's enemies *the sun goes down at noon*, so to the church it rises at night; unto the upright springs *light out of darkness* (Ps. cxii. 4); deliverance comes when the tale of bricks is doubled, and when God's people have done looking for it, and so it comes with a pleasing surprise.

8 And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. 9 And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one. 10 All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and *from* the tower of Hananeel unto the king's wine-presses. 11 And *men* shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited. 12 And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth. 13 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour. 14 And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. 15 And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague.

Here are, I. Blessings promised to Jeru-

salem, the gospel-Jerusalem, in the day of the Messiah, and to all the earth, by virtue of the blessings poured out on Jerusalem, especially to the land of Israel.

1. Jerusalem shall be a spring of living waters to the world; it was made so when there the Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, and thence the word of the Lord diffused itself to the nations about (v. 8). *Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem*; for there they began, and thence those set out who were to preach *repentance and remission of sins unto all nations*, Luke xxiv. 47. Note, Where the gospel goes, and the graces of God's Spirit go along with it, there living waters go; those streams that *make glad the city of our God* make glad the country also, and make it like paradise, like the *garden of the Lord*, which was *well watered*. It was the honour of Jerusalem that *thence the word of the Lord went forth* (Isa. ii. 3); and thus far, even in its worst and most degenerate age, for old acquaintance-sake, it was made a blessing, and to be so is to be blessed. Half of these waters shall go towards the former sea and half towards the hinder sea, as all rivers bend their course towards some sea or other, some eastward, others westward. The gospel shall spread into all parts of the world, into some that lie remote from Jerusalem one way and others that lie as far off another way; for the dominion of the Redeemer, which was thereby to be set up, must be *from sea to sea* (Ps. lxxii. 8), and the earth must be *full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*, and as the waters that in various channels run to the sea. The knowledge of God shall diffuse itself, (1.) Every way. These living waters shall produce both eastern churches and western churches, that shall each of them in its turn be illustrious. (2.) Every day: *In summer and in winter it shall be*. Note, Those who are employed in spreading the gospel may find themselves work both *winter and summer*, and are to serve the Lord therein at all seasons, Acts xx. 18. And such a divine power goes along with these living waters that they shall not be dried up, nor the course of them be obstructed, either by the droughts in summer or by the frosts in winter.

2. The kingdom of God among men shall be a universal and united kingdom, v. 9. (1.) It shall be a universal kingdom: *The Lord shall be King over all the earth*. He is, and ever was, so of right, and in the sovereign disposals of his providence his kingdom does *rule over all* and none are exempt from his jurisdiction; but it is here promised that he shall be so by actual possession of the hearts of his subjects; he shall be acknowledged King by all in all places; his authority shall be owned and submitted to, and allegiance sworn to him. This will have its accomplishment with that word (Rev. xi. 15), *The kingdoms of this world have become*

*the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.*

(2.) It shall be a united kingdom: *There shall be one Lord, and his name one.* All shall worship one God only, and not idols, and shall be unanimous in the worship of him. All false gods shall be abandoned, and all false ways of worship abolished; and as God shall be the centre of their unity, in whom they shall all meet, so the scripture shall be the rule of their unity, by which they shall all walk.

3. The land of Judea, and Jerusalem, its mother-city, shall be repaired and replenished, and taken under the special protection of Heaven, v. 10, 11. Some think this denotes particular favour to the people of the Jews, and points at their conversion and restoration in the latter days; but it is rather to be understood figuratively of the gospel-church, typified by Judah and Jerusalem, and it signifies the abundant graces with which the church shall be crowned, and the fruitfulness of its members, and the vast numbers of them. (1.) The church shall be like a fruitful country, abounding in all the rich products of the soil. The whole land of Judea, which is naturally uneven and hilly, shall be *turned as a plain*; it shall become a smooth level valley, from Geba, or Gibeah, its utmost border north, to Rimmon, which lay south of Jerusalem and was the utmost southern limit of Judea. The gospel of Christ, where it comes in its power, levels the ground; mountains and hills are brought low by it, that the Lord alone may be exalted. (2.) It shall be like a populous city. As the holy land shall be levelled, so the holy city shall be peopled, shall be rebuilt and replenished. *Jerusalem shall be lifted up* out of its low estate, shall be raised out of its ruins; when the land is turned as a plain, and not only the mount of Olives removed (v. 4), but other mountains too, then Jerusalem shall be *lifted up*, that is, shall appear the more conspicuous; she shall be *inhabited in her place*, even in Jerusalem, ch. xii. 6. The whole city shall be inhabited in the utmost extent of it, and no part of it left to lie waste. The utmost limits of it are here mentioned, between which there shall be no ground lost, but all built upon, from Benjamin's-gate north-east to the corner-gate north-west, and from the tower of Hananeel in the south to the king's wine-presses in the north; when the churches of Christ in all places are replenished with great numbers of holy, humble, serious Christians, and many such are daily added to it, then this promise is fulfilled. (3.) This country and this city shall both be safe, both the meat in the country and the mouths in the city: *Those that dwell in it shall dwell securely*, and there shall be none to make them afraid; there shall be no more of that utter destruction that has laid both town and country waste, no more anathema (as some read it), no more cutting off, no more curse, or separation from God to evil,

no more such desolating judgments as you have been groaning under, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited; there shall be no danger, nor any apprehension of it; neither shall its friends be fearful to disquiet themselves nor its enemies formidable to disquiet them. That promise of Christ explains this—that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*; and so do the holy security and serenity of mind which believers enjoy in relying on the divine protection.

II. Here are judgments threatened against the enemies of the church, that *have fought, or do fight, against Jerusalem*; and the threatening of these judgments is in order to the preservation of the church in safety. Men that read and hear of these plagues will be afraid of fighting against Jerusalem, much more when these threatenings are fulfilled in some will others hear and fear. Those that fight against the city of God, and his people, will be found fighting against God, against whom none ever hardened his heart and prospered (v. 12): *This shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem*; whoever they are, God will punish them for the affront done to him, and avenge Jerusalem upon them. 1. They shall waste away under grievous and languishing diseases. *Their flesh shall consume away*, and they shall be miserably emaciated, even while they stand on their feet, so that they shall be walking skeletons; nothing shall remain but skin and bones. The flesh which they pampered and indulged, and made provision for, when they were fed to the full with the spoils of God's people, shall now consume away, that it cannot be seen, and the bones that were not seen shall stick out, Job xxxiii. 21. They keep their feet, and hope to keep their ground, crawling about as long as they can; but they must yield at last. The organs of sight, the outlets of sin, *their eyes, shall consume away in their holes*, shall sink into their heads or perhaps start out of them; their envious, malicious, adulterous eyes, the eyes they had so often fed with spectacles of misery, these shall consume, which shall make not only their countenances ghastly, but their lives wretched. The organs of speech, the outlets of sin, *their tongue, shall consume away in their mouth*, whereby God will reckon with them for all their blasphemies against himself and invectives against his people. Thus *their own tongues shall fall upon them*, and their punishment shall be legible in their sin, as his was whose tongue was tormented in hell-flames. Thus Antiochus and Herod consumed away. 2. They shall be dashed in pieces one against another (v. 13): *A great tumult from the Lord shall be among them*. But are tumults from the Lord, who is the God of order, and not of confusion? As they are the sin of those that raise them they are not from the Lord, but from the wicked one, and from men's own lusts; but, as they are



the punishment of those that suffer by them, they are from the Lord, who serves his own purposes, and carries on his intentions, by the sins, and follies, and restless spirits, of men. It is of themselves that they *bite and devour one another*, but it is of the Lord, the righteous Judge, that thus they are *consumed one of another* (Gal. v. 15); as Ahab was deceived by a lying spirit from the Lord, so Abimelech and the men of Shechem were *divided*, and so *destroyed*, by an *evil spirit from the Lord*, Judg. ix. 23. Note, Those that are confederate and combined against the church will justly be separated, and set against one another; and their tumults raised against God will be avenged in tumults among themselves. And they shall *lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour*, to hold him from striking, or to bind him as his prisoner; nay, *his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour*, to strike and wound him. Note, Those that aim to destroy the church are often made to destroy one another; and every man's sword is sometimes set against his fellow, by him whose sword they all are. Some think this was fulfilled in the factions and dissensions that were among the Jews, when the Romans were destroying them all; for they had fought against the spiritual Jerusalem, the gospel-church; and to that well enough agrees v. 14, *Thou also, O Judah! shalt fight against Jerusalem*; the Jewish nation shall be ruined by itself, shall die by its own hands; the city and country shall be at war with each other, and so both shall be destroyed. *Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit*—Rome was urged into ruin by its very strength. 3. The plunder of their camp shall greatly enrich the people of God, or the spoils of their country (v. 14): *Judah also shall eat at Jerusalem* (so one learned interpreter reads it); people shall come from all parts to share in the prey; as when Sennacherib's army was routed before Jerusalem there was *the prey of a great spoil divided* (Isa. xxxiii. 23), so it shall be now; *the wealth of all the heathen round about*, that had spoiled Jerusalem, *shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance*, that an equal dividend may be made among all the parties entitled to a share of the prize. Note, *The wealth of the sinner is often laid up for the just*, and the Israel of God enriched with the spoil of the Egyptians. 4. The very cattle shall share in the plague with which the enemies of God's church shall be cut off, as they did in divers of the plagues of Egypt (v. 15): *All the beasts that shall be in the tents of these wicked men*, when God comes to contend with them, shall perish with them, not only beasts used in war, as the horse, but those used for travel, or in the plough, as the mule, the camel, and the ass. Note, The inferior creatures often suffer for the sin of man and in his plagues. Thus God will show his indignation against sin, and will make the creature that is thus

subject to *vanity* groan to be *delivered* into the glorious liberty of the children of God, Rom. viii. 21, 22.

16 And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. 17 And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, *that have no rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 20 In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. 21 Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.

Three things are here foretold:—

I. That a gospel-way of worship being set up in the church there shall be a great resort to it and a general attendance upon it. Those that were left of the enemies of religion shall be so sensible of the mercy of God to them in their narrow escape that they shall apply themselves to the worship of the God of Israel, and pay their homage to him, v. 16. Those that were not consumed shall be converted, and this makes their deliverance a mercy indeed, a double mercy. It is a great change that the grace of God makes upon them; those that had *come against Jerusalem*, finding their attempts vain and fruitless, shall become as much her admirers as ever they had been her adversaries, and shall *come to Jerusalem* to worship there, and go in concurrence with those whom they had gone contrary to. Note, As some of Christ's foes shall be made his footstool, so others of them shall be made his friends; and, when the principle of enmity is slain in them, their former acts of hosti-

lity are pardoned to them, and their services are admitted and accepted, as though they had never fought against Jerusalem. They shall go up to worship at Jerusalem, because that was the place which God had chosen, and there the temple was, which was a type of Christ and his mediation. Converting grace sets us right, 1. In the object of our worship. *They shall no longer worship the Molochs and Baals, the kings and lords*, that the Gentiles worship, the creatures of their own imagination, but *the King, the Lord of hosts*, the everlasting King, the King of kings, the sovereign Lord of all. 2. In the ordinances of worship, those which God himself has appointed. Gospel-worship is here represented by the *keeping of the feast of tabernacles*, for the sake of those two great graces which were in a special manner acted and signified in that feast—contempt of the world, and joy in God, Neh. viii. 17. The life of a good Christian is a constant *feast of tabernacles*, and, in all acts of devotion, we must retire from the world and rejoice in the Lord, must worship as in that feast. 3. In the Mediator of our worship; we must go to Christ our temple with all our offerings, for in him only our *spiritual sacrifices* are acceptable to God, 1 Pet. ii. 5. If we rest in ourselves, we come short of pleasing God; we must go up to him, and mention his righteousness only. 4. In the time of it; we must be constant. They shall go up from year to year, at the times appointed for this solemn feast. Every day of a Christian's life is a day of the *feast of tabernacles*, and every Lord's day especially (that is the *great day of the feast*); and therefore every day we must worship the Lord of hosts and every Lord's day with a peculiar solemnity.

II. That those who neglect the duties of gospel-worship shall be reckoned with for their neglect. God will compel them to come and worship before him, by suspending his favours from those that keep not his ordinances: *Upon them there shall be no rain*, v. 17. Some understand it figuratively; the rain of heavenly doctrine shall be withheld, and of the heavenly grace, which should accompany that doctrine. God will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon them. Note, It is a righteous thing with God to withhold the blessings of grace from those that do not attend the means of grace, to deny the *green pastures* to those that attend not the *shepherd's tents*. Or we may take it literally: *On them there shall be no rain*, to make their ground fruitful. Note, The gifts of common providence are justly denied to those that neglect and despise instituted ordinances. Those that neglected to build the temple were punished with the want of rain (Hag. ii. 17), and so were those that neglected to attend there when it was built. If we be barren and unfruitful towards God, justly is the earth made so to us. Many are crossed, and go

backward, in their affairs, and this is at the bottom of it—they do not keep close to the worship of God as they should; they go off from God, and then he walks contrary to them. If we omit or postpone the duties he expects from us, it is just with him to deny the favours we expect from him. But what shall be done to the defaulters of the land of Egypt, to whom the threatening of the want of rain is no threatening, for they have no rain at any time; they need none; they desire none; the river Nilus is to them instead of the clouds of heaven, waters their land, and makes it fruitful, so that what is a punishment to others is none to them? v. 18, 19. It is threatened that *if the family of Egypt go not up, that have no rain*, yet God will find out a way to meet with them, for there shall be, in effect, the same plague wherewith other nations are smitten for their neglect. God can, and often did, restrain the overflowing of the river, which was equivalent to the shutting up of the clouds; or if the river did its part, and rose as high as it used to do, God had other ways of bringing famine upon them, and destroying the fruits of their ground, as he did by several of the ten plagues of Egypt, so that *this* (that is, the same) shall be the *punishment of Egypt* that is the punishment of other nations who come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. Note, Those who think themselves least indebted to, and depending on, the mercy of heaven, cannot therefore think themselves guarded against the justice of Heaven. It does not follow that those who can live without rain can therefore live without God; for not the heavens only, but all other creatures, are that to us that God makes them to be, and no more; nor can any man's way of living enable him to set light by the judgments of God. This shall be the punishment—margin, *This shall be the sin of Egypt, and the sin of all nations, that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles*. The same word signifies both sin and the punishment of sin, so close and inseparable is the connexion between them (as Gen. iv. 7), and sin is often its own punishment. Note, Omissions are sins, and we must come into judgment for them; those contract guilt that go not up to worship at the times appointed, as they have opportunity; and it is a sin that is its own punishment, for those who forsake the duty forfeit the privilege of communion with God.

III. That those who perform the duties of gospel-worship shall have grace to adorn their profession by the duties of a gospel-conversation too. This is promised (v. 20, 21), and it is necessary to the completing of the beauty and happiness of the church. In general, all shall be holiness to the Lord.

1. The name and character of holiness shall not be so confined as formerly. *Holiness to the Lord* had been written only upon the high priest's forehead, but now it shall not



be so appropriated. All Christians shall be *living temples*, and *spiritual priests*, dedicated to the honour of God and employed in his service.

2. Real holiness shall be more diffused than it had been, because there shall be more powerful means of sanctification, more excellent rules, more cogent arguments, and brighter patterns of holiness, and because there shall be a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of holiness and sanctification, after Christ's ascension than ever before.

(1.) There shall be holiness introduced into common things; and those things shall be devoted to God that seemed very foreign. [1.] The furniture of their horses shall be consecrated to God. "*Upon the bells of the horses shall be engraven Holiness to the Lord*, or upon the *bridles* of the horses (so the margin) or the *trappings*. The horses used in war shall no longer be used against God and his people, as they have been, but for him and them. Even their wars shall be holy wars, their troopers serving under God's banner. Their great men, who ride in state with a pompous retinue, shall reckon it their greatest ornament to honour God with their honours. *Holiness to the Lord* shall be written on the harness of their chariot-horses, as great men have sometimes their coat of arms with their motto painted on their coaches; every gentleman shall take the high priest's motto for his, and glory in it, and make it a memento to himself not to do any thing unworthy of it. Travellers shall have it upon their bridles, with which they guide their horses, as those who desire always to be put in mind of it, by having it continually before them, and to guide themselves in all their motions by this rule. The *bells of the horses*, which are designed to quicken them in their journey and to give notice of their approach, shall have *Holiness to the Lord* upon them," to signify that this is that which we ought to be influenced by ourselves, and make profession of to others, wherever we go. [2.] The furniture of their houses too shall be consecrated to God, to be employed in his service. *First*, The furniture of the priests' houses, or apartments adjoining to the house of the Lord. The common drinking cups they used shall be *like the bowls before the altar*, that were used either to receive the blood of the sacrifices or to present the wine and oil in, which were for the *drink-offerings*. The vessels which they used for their own tables shall be used in such a religious manner, with such sobriety and temperance, such devotedness to the glory of God, and such a mixture of pious thoughts and expressions, that their meals shall look like sacrifices; they shall eat and drink, not to themselves, but to him that spreads their tables and fills their cups. And thus, in ministers' families especially, should common actions be done after a godly sort, however they are done in other families.

*Secondly*, The furniture of other houses, those of the common people: "*Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness to the Lord*. The pots in which they boil their meat, the cups out of which they drink their wine (Jer. xxxv. 5), in these God's good creatures shall never be abused to excess, nor that made the food and fuel of lust which should be oil to the wheels of obedience," as had formerly been, when *all tables were full of vomit and filthiness*, Isa. xxviii. 8. "What they eat and drink out of these shall nourish their bodies for the service of God; and out of these they shall give liberally for the relief of the poor;" then are they *Holiness to the Lord*, as the merchandise and the hire of the converted Tyrians are said to be (Isa. xxiii. 18); for both in our gettings and in our spendings we must have an eye to the will of God as our rule and the glory of God as our end. *Thirdly*, When there shall be such an abundance of real holiness people shall not be nice and curious about ceremonial holiness: "*Those that sacrifice shall come and take of these common vessels, and see the their sacrifices therein*, making no distinction between them and the *bowls before the altar*." In gospel-times the true worshippers shall worship God *in spirit and in truth*, and *neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem*, John iv. 21. One place shall be as acceptable to God as another (*I will that men pray every where*); and one vessel shall be as acceptable as another. Little regard shall be had to the circumstance, provided there be nothing indecent or disorderly, while the substance is religiously preserved and adhered to. Some think it intimates that there should be greater numbers of sacrifices offered than the vessels of the sanctuary would serve for; but, rather than any should be turned back or deferred, they shall make no difficulty at all of using common vessels, as the Levites in a case of necessity helped the priests to kill the sacrifices, 2 Chron. xxix. 34.

(2.) There shall be no unholiness introduced into their sacred things, to corrupt them: *In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts*. Some read it, There shall be no more the *merchant*, for so a Canaanite sometimes signifies; and they think it was fulfilled when Christ once and again drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. Or though those that were Canaanites, strangers and foreigners, shall be brought into the house of the Lord, yet they shall cease to be Canaanites; they shall have nothing of the spirit or disposition of Canaanites in them. Or it intimates that though in gospel-times people should grow indifferent as to holy vessels, yet they should be very strict in church-discipline, and careful not to admit the profane to special ordinances, but to separate between the precious and the vile, between Israelites and Canaanites. Yet this will not

have its full accomplishment short of the heavenly Jerusalem, that *house of the Lord* of hosts, into which *no unclean thing shall enter*; for at the end of time, and not before, Christ shall gather out of his kingdom every thing that offends, and the tares and wheat shall be perfectly and eternally separated.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

### WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

#### OF THE PROPHECY OF

# M A L A C H I.

God's prophets were his witnesses to his church, each in his day, for several ages, witnesses for him and his authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, attesting the true intents of God's providences in his dealings with his people then and the kind intentions of his grace concerning his church in the days of the Messiah, to whom all the prophets bore witness, for they all agreed in their testimony; and now we have only one witness more to call, and we have done with our evidence; and though he be the last, and in him prophecy ceased, yet the Spirit of prophecy shines as clearly, as strongly, as brightly in him as in any that went before, and his testimony challenges an equal regard. The Jews say, Prophecy continued forty years under the second temple, and this prophet they call the *seal of prophecy*, because in him the series or succession of prophets broke off and came to a period. God wisely ordered it so that divine inspiration should cease for some ages before the coming of the Messiah, that that great prophet might appear the more conspicuous and distinguishable and be the more welcome. Let us consider, I. The person of the prophet. We have only his name, *Malachi*, and no account of his country or parentage. *Malachi* signifies *my angel*, which has given occasion for a conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man, as that Judges ii. 1. But there is no just ground for the conjecture. Prophets were messengers, God's messengers; this prophet was so; his name is the very same with that which we find in the original (*ch. iii. 1*) for *my messenger*; and perhaps from that word he might (though, probably, he had another name) be called *Malachi*. The Chaldee paraphrase, and some of the Jews, suggest that Malachi was the same with Ezra; but that also is groundless. Ezra was a scribe, but we never read that he was a prophet. Others, yet further from probability, make him to be Mordecai. But we have reason to conclude he was a person whose proper name was that by which he is here called; the tradition of some of the ancients is that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, and that he died young. II. The scope of the prophecy. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to reprove the people for delaying to build the temple; Malachi was sent to reprove them for the neglect of it when it was built, and for their profanation of the temple-service (for from idolatry and superstition they ran into the other extreme of impiety and irreligion), and the sins he witnesses against are the same that we find complained of in Nehemiah's time, with whom, it is probable, he was contemporary. And now that prophecy was to cease he speaks more clearly of the Messiah, as high at hand, than any other of the prophets had done, and concludes with a direction to the people of God to keep in remembrance the law of Moses, while they were in expectation of the gospel of Christ.

#### CHAP. I.

This prophet is sent first to convince and then to comfort, first to discover sin and to reprove for that and then to promise the coming of him who shall take away sin. And this method the blessed Spirit takes in dealing with souls, John xvi. 8. He first opens the wound and then applies the healing balm. God had provided (and one would think effectually) for the engaging of Israel to himself by providences and ordinances; but it seems, by the complaints here made of them, that they received the grace of God in both these in vain. I. They were very ungrateful to God for his favours to them, and rendered not again according to the benefit they received, ver. 1-5. II. They were very careless and remiss

in the observance of his institutions, the priests especially were so, who were in a particular manner charged with them, ver. 6-14. And what shall we say of those whom neither providences nor ordinances work upon, and who affront God in those very things wherein they should honour him?

**T**HE burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. 2 I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved



us? *Was not Esau Jacob's brother?* saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, 3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. 4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. 5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

The prophecy of this book is entitled, *The burden of the word of the Lord* (v. 1), which intimates, 1. That it was of great weight and importance; what the false prophets said was light as the chaff, what the true prophets said was ponderous as the wheat, Jer. xxiii. 28. 2. That it ought to be often repeated to them and by them, as the burden of a song. 3. That there were those to whom it was a burden and a reproach; they were weary of it, and found themselves so aggrieved by it that they were not able to bear it. 4. That to them it would prove a burden indeed, to sink them to the lowest hell, unless they repented. 5. That to those who loved it and embraced it, and bade it welcome, though it was a light burden, as our Saviour calls it (Matt. xi. 30), yet it was a burden.

This *burden of the word of the Lord* was sent, 1. To Israel, for to them pertained the lively oracles of prophecy as well as those of the written word. Many prophets God had sent to Israel, and now he will try them with one more. 2. *By Malachi, by the hand of Malachi*, as if it were not a message by word of mouth, but a letter put into his hand, for the greater certainty.

In these verses, they are charged with ingratitude, in that they were not duly sensible of God's distinguishing goodness to them; and such a charge as this may well be called a burden, for it is a heavy one.

I. God asserts the great kindness he had, and had often expressed, for them (v. 2): *I have loved you, saith the Lord*. Thus abruptly does the sermon begin, as if God intended, whatever reproofs should be given them, to reconcile them to his love, and to take care that they should still have good thoughts of him. *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten*. Thus kindly does the sermon begin. God will have his people satisfied that he loves them and is ever mindful of his love. This is the same with what he said of old to the virgin of Israel, that he might engage her affections to himself (Jer. xxxi. 3, 4): *Yea,*

*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*. In this one word God sums up all his gracious dealings with them; love was the spring of all; he loved them because he would love them (Deut. vii. 7, 8), loved them in their childhood, Hos. xi. 1. His delight was in them, Isa. lxii. 4. "*I have loved you*, but you have not loved me, nor made any suitable returns for my love." Note, God's people need to be often reminded of his love to them.

II. They question his love, and diminish the instances of it, and seem to quarrel with him for telling them of it: *Yet you say, Wherein hast thou loved us?* As God traces up all his favours to them to the fountain, which was his love, so he traces up all their sins against him to the fountain, which was their contempt of his love. Instead of acknowledging his kindness, and studying what they shall render, they scorn to own that they have been beholden to him, challenge him to produce proofs of his love that are material, and think and speak very slightly of the instances they have had of his kindness, as if they were so few, so small, as not to be worth taking notice of, and no more than what they had sufficiently made returns for, or at least than he had sufficiently balanced with instances of his wrath. "*Have we not been wasted, impoverished, and carried captive; and wherein then hast thou loved us?*" Note, God justly takes it very ill to have his favours slighted, as not worth speaking of; and it is very absurd for us to ask wherein he has loved us, when, which way soever we look, we meet with the proofs and instances of his love to us.

III. He makes it out, beyond contradiction, that he has loved them, loved them in a distinguishing way, which was in a special manner obliging. For proof of this he shows the difference he had made, and would still make, between Jacob and Esau, between Israelites and Edomites. Some read their question, *Wherefore hast thou loved us?* as if they did indeed own that he had loved them, but withal insinuate that there was a reason for it—that he loved them because their father Abraham had loved him, so that it was not a free love, but a love of debt, to which he replies, "*Was not Esau as near akin to Abraham as you are? Was he not Jacob's own brother, his elder brother? And therefore, if there were any right to a recompence for Abraham's love, Esau had it, and yet I hated Esau and loved Jacob.*"

1. Let them see what a difference God had made between Jacob and Esau. Esau was Jacob's brother, his twin-brother: "*Yet I loved Jacob and I hated Esau*, that is, took Jacob into covenant, and entailed the blessing on him and his, but refused and rejected Esau." Note, Those that are taken into covenant with God, that have the lively oracles and the means of grace committed to them, have reason to look upon these as

tokens of his love. Jacob is loved, for he has these, Esau hated, for he has not. The apostle quotes this (Rom. ix. 13), and compares it with what the oracle said to Rebecca concerning her twins (Gen. xxv. 23), *The elder shall serve the younger*, to illustrate the doctrine of God's sovereignty in dispensing his favours; for *may he not do what he will with his own?* Esau was justly hated, but Jacob freely loved; even so, Father, *because it seemed good in thy eyes*, and it is not for us to ask why or wherefore.

2. Let them see what he was now doing and would do with them, pursuant to this original difference.

(1.) The Edomites shall be made the monuments of God's justice, and he will be glorified in their utter destruction: For *Esau have I hated; I laid his mountains waste*, the mountains of Seir, which were *his heritage*. When all that part of the world was ravaged by the Chaldean army the country of Edom was, among the rest, laid in ruins, and became a habitation for the dragons of the wilderness, so perfectly desolate was it; as was foretold, Isa. xxxiv. 6, 11. The Edomites had triumphed in Jerusalem's overthrow (Ps. cxxxvii. 7), and therefore it was just with God to put the same cup of trembling into their hands. And, though Edom's ruins were last, yet they were lasting, and the desolation perpetual; and in this the difference was made between Jacob and Esau, and is made between the righteous and the wicked, to whom otherwise all things come alike, and there seems to be one event. Jacob's cities are laid waste, but they are rebuilt; Edom's are laid waste, and never rebuilt. The sufferings of the righteous will have an end and will end well; all their grievances will be redressed, and their sorrow turned into joy; but the sufferings of the wicked will be endless and remediless, as Edom's desolations, v. 4. Observe here, [1.] The vain hopes of the Edomites, that they shall have their ruins repaired as well as Israel, though they had no promise to build their hope upon. They say, "It is true, *we are impoverished*; it is the common chance, and there is no remedy; but *we will return and build the desolate places*; we are resolved we will" (not so much as asking God leave); "*we will* whether he will or no; nay, we will do it in defiance of God's curse, and that sentence pronounced upon Edom (Isa. xxxiv. 10), *From generation to generation it shall lie waste*." They build presumptuously, as Hiel built Jericho in direct contradiction to the word of God (1 Kings xvi. 34), and it shall speed accordingly. Note, It is common for those whose hearts are unhumiliated under humbling providences to think to make their part good against God himself, and to build, and plant, and flourish again as much as ever, though God has said that they shall be impoverished. But see, [2.] The dashing of these hopes

and the disappointment of them. They say, *We will build*; but what says the Lord of hosts? For we are sure his word shall stand, and not theirs; and he says, *First, Their attempts shall be baffled: They shall build, but I will throw down*. Note, Those that walk contrary to God will find that he will walk contrary to them; for *who ever hardened his heart against God and prospered?* When the Jews had rejected Christ and his gospel they became Edomites, and this word was fulfilled in them; for when, in the time of the emperor Adrian, they attempted to rebuild Jerusalem, God by earthquakes and eruptions of fire threw down what they built, so that they were forced to quit the enterprise. Secondly, They shall be looked upon by all as abandoned to utter ruin. All that see them shall call them *the border of wickedness*, a sinful nation, incurably so, and therefore *the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever*. Since their wickedness is such as will never be reformed, their desolations shall be such as are never to be repaired. Against Israel God was a little displeased (Zech. i. 15), but against Edom he has indignation, and will have for ever, for they are *the people of his curse*, Isa. xxxiv. 5.

(2.) The Israelites shall be made the monuments of his mercy, and he will be glorified in their salvation, v. 5. "The Edomites shall be stigmatized as a people hated of God, *but your eyes shall see* your doubts concerning his love to you for ever silenced; for you shall say, and have cause to say, *The Lord is and will be magnified from the border of Israel*, from every part and border of the land of Israel." The border of Edom is a *border of wickedness*, and therefore the Lord will have *indignation against it for ever*; but the border of Israel is a *border of holiness*, the border of the sanctuary (Ps. lxxviii. 54), and therefore God will make it to appear (though it may for a time lie desolate) that he has mercy in store for it, and thence *he will be magnified*; he will give his people Israel both cause, and hearts, to praise him. When the border of Edom still remains desolate, and the border of Israel is repaired and replenished, then it will appear that God has loved Jacob. Note, [1.] Those who doubt of God's love to his people shall, sooner or later, have convincing and undeniable proofs given them of it: "*Your own eyes shall see* what you will not believe." [2.] Deliverances out of trouble are to be reckoned proofs of God's good-will to his people, though they may be suffered to fall into trouble, Ps. xxxiv. 19. [3.] Distinguishing favours are very obliging. If God rear up again the border of Israel, but leave the border of Edom in ruins, let no Israelite ask, for shame, *Wherein hast thou loved us?* [4.] The dignifying of Israel is the magnifying of the God of Israel, and, one way or other, God will have honour from his pro-



fessing people. [5.] God's goodness being his glory, when he does us good we must proclaim him great, for that is magnifying him. It is an instance of his goodness that he has *pleasure in the prosperity of his servants*, and for this those that love his salvation say, *The Lord be magnified*, Ps. xxxv. 27.

6 A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? 7 Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD *is* contemptible. 8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, *is it* not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, *is it* not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. 9 And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts. 10 Who *is there* even among you that would shut the doors *for nought*? neither do ye kindle *fire* on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. 11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD *is* polluted; and the fruit thereof, *even* his meat, *is* contemptible. 13 Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness *is it*! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought *that which was* torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD. 14 But cursed *be* the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and

sacrificeth unto the LORD a corrupt thing: for I *am* a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name *is* dreadful among the heathen.

The prophet is here, by a special commission, calling the priests to account, though they were themselves appointed judges, to call the people to an account. Let the rulers in the house of God know that there is one above them, who will reckon with them for their mal-administrations. Thus saith the LORD of hosts to you, O priests! v. 6. God will have a saying to unfaithful ministers; and it concerns those who speak from God to his people to hear and heed what he says to them, that they may *save themselves* in the first place, otherwise how should they help to *save those that hear them*? It is a severe, and no doubt a just reproof, that is here given to the *priests*, for the profanation of the holy things of God, with which they were entrusted; and, if this was the crime of the priests, we have reason to fear the people also were guilty of it: so that what is said to the *priests* is said to *all*, nay, it is said to *us*, who, as Christians, profess ourselves, not only the people of God, but priests to him. Observe here,

I. What it was that God expected from them, and with what good reason he expected it (v. 6): *A son honours his father*, because he is his father; nature has written this law in the hearts of children, before God wrote it at Mount Sinai; nay, a *servant*, though his obligation to his master is not natural, but by voluntary compact, yet thinks it his duty to honour him, to be observant of his orders, and true to his interests. Children and servants pay respect to their parents and masters; every one cries out shame on them if they do not, and their own hearts cannot but reproach them too; the order of families is thus kept up, and it is their beauty and advantage. But the priests, who are God's children and his servants, do not fear and honour him. They were *fathers* and *masters* to the people, and expected to be called so (Judges xviii. 19, Matt. xxii. 7, 10) and to be revered and obeyed as such; but they forgot their Father and Master in heaven, and the duty they owed to him. We may each of us charge upon ourselves what is here charged upon the priests. Note, 1. We are every one of us to look upon God as our Father and Master, and upon ourselves as his children and servants. 2. Our relation to God as our Father and Master strongly obliges us to fear and honour him. If we honour and fear the fathers of our flesh, much more the Father and Master of our spirits, Heb. xii. 9. 3. It is a thing to be justly complained of, and lamented, that God is so little feared and honoured even by those that own him for their Father and Master. *Where is his honour? Where is his fear?*

II. What the contempt was which the priests put upon God.

1. This is that, in general, which is charged upon them:—(1.) They despised God's name; their familiarity with it, as priests, bred contempt of it, and served them only to gain a veneration by it for themselves and their own name, while God's name was of small account with them. God's name is all that whereby he has made himself known—his word and ordinances; these they had low thoughts of, and vilified that which it was their business to magnify; and no wonder that when they despised it themselves they did that which made it despicable to others, causing even the *sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*, as Eli's sons did. (2.) They profaned God's name, v. 12. They polluted it, v. 7. They not only made no account of sacred things, but they made an ill use of them, and perverted them to the service of the worst and vilest purposes—their own pride, covetousness, and luxury. There cannot be a greater provocation to God than the profanation of his name; for it is holy and reverend. His purity cannot be polluted by us, for he is unspotted, but his name may be profaned; and nothing profanes it more than the misconduct of priests, whose business it is to do honour to it. This is the general charge exhibited against them. To this they plead *Not guilty*, and challenge God to prove it upon them, and to make good the charge, which added daring impudence to their daring impiety: *You say, Wherein have we despised thy name?* (v. 6), and *wherein have we polluted thee?* v. 7. It is common with proud sinners, when they are reproved, to stand thus upon their own justification. These priests had most horridly profaned sacred things, and yet, like the *adulterous woman*, they said that they had *done no wickedness*; they were so inob-servant of themselves that they remembered not or reflected not upon their own acts, or they were so ignorant of the divine law that they thought there was no harm in them, and that what they did could not be construed into despising God's name, or they were so atheistical as to imagine that though they knew their own guilt yet God did not, or they were so scornful in their conduct towards God and his prophets that they took a pride in bantering a serious and just reproof, and turning it off with a jest. They either laugh at the reproof, as those that despise it, and harden their hearts against it, or they laugh it off, as those that resolve they will not be touched by it, or will not seem to be so. Which way soever we take it, their defence was their offence, and, in justifying themselves, their own tongues condemned them, and their saying, *Wherein have we despised thy name?* proved them proud and perverse. Had they asked this question with a humble desire to be told more particularly wherein they had offended,

it would have been an evidence of their repentance, and would have given hopes of their reformation; but to ask it thus in disdain and defiance of the word of God argues their hearts *fully set in them to do evil*. Note, Sinners ruin themselves by studying to baffle their own convictions; but they will find it *hard to kick against the pricks*.

2. Justly might they have been convicted and condemned upon the general charge, and their plea thrown out as frivolous; but God will not only overcome, but will be clear, will be justified when he judges, and therefore he shows them very particularly wherein they had despised his name, and what the contempt was that they cast upon him. As formerly, when he charged them with idolatry, so now, when he charges them with profaneness, he bids them *see their way in the valley and know what they have done*, Jer. ii. 23.

(1.) They despised God's name in what they said, in the low opinion they had of his institutions: "*You say in your hearts, and perhaps speak it out when you priests get together over your cups, out of the hearing of the people, The table of the Lord is contemptible*" (v. 7), and again (v. 12), "*You say, The table of the Lord is polluted*"; it is to be no more regarded than any other table." Either the table in the temple, on which the show-bread was placed, is that which they reflect upon (not understanding the mystery of it, they despised it as an insignificant thing), or rather the altar of burnt-offerings is here called the table, for there God, and his priests, and his people, did, as it were, feast together upon the sacrifices, in token of friendship. This they thought was contemptible. Formerly, in the days of superstition, it was thought contemptible in comparison with the idolatrous altars that the heathen had, and was set aside to make room for a new-fashioned one (2 Kings xvi. 14, 15); now it is thought contemptible in comparison with their own tables, and those of their great men: *The fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible*. Those who served at the altar were to live upon the altar; but they complained that they lived poorly and meanly, and that it was not worth while to attend the service of the altar for the fruit and meat of it, for it was very ordinary and always the same again; they had no dainties, no varieties, no nice dishes. Nay, that part of the sacrifices which was given to God, the blood and the fat, they looked upon with contempt, as not worthy the multitude of laws God had made about it; they asked, "What need is there of so much ado about burning the fat and pouring out the blood?" Note, Those greatly profane and pollute God's name who despise the business of religion, though it is very honourable, as not worth taking pains in, and the advantages of religion, though highly valuable, as not worth taking pains for. Those who live in a



careless neglect of holy ordinances, who come to them and attend on them irreverently, and go away from them never the better and under no concern, do in effect say, "*The table of the Lord is contemptible; there is neither virtue nor value in it, neither credit nor comfort from it.*"

(2.) They despised God's name in what they did, which was of a piece with what they said, and flowed from it; corrupt principles and notions are roots of bitterness, which bear the gall and wormwood of corrupt practices. They looked upon the table and altar of the Lord as contemptible, and then, [1.] They thought any thing would serve for a sacrifice, though ever so coarse and mean, and were so far from bringing the best, as they ought to have done, that they picked out the worst they had, which was fit neither for the market nor for their own tables, and offered that at God's altar. With every sacrifice they were to bring a meat-offering of *fine flour mingled with oil*; but they brought *polluted bread* (v. 7), coarse bread, servants' bread, perhaps it was dry and mouldy, or made of the refuse of the wheat, which they thought good enough to be burnt upon the altar; for had it been better they would have said, *To what purpose is this waste?* And as to the beasts they offered, though the law was express that what was offered in sacrifice should not have a blemish, yet they brought *the blind, and the lame, and the sick* (v. 8), and again (v. 13), *the torn, and the lame, and the sick*, that was ready to die of itself. They looked no further than the burning of the sacrifice, and they pleaded that it was a pity to burn it if it was good for any thing else. The people were so far convinced of their duty that they would bring sacrifices; they durst not wholly omit the duty, but they brought vain oblations, mocked God, and deceived themselves, by bringing the worst they had; and the priests, who should have taught them better, accepted the gifts brought to the altar and offered them up there, because, if they should refuse them, the people would bring none at all, and then they would lose their perquisites; and therefore, having more regard to their own profit than to God's honour, they accepted that which they knew he would not accept. Some make v. 8 to be a continuation of what the priests profanely said v. 7, *You say to the people, If you offer the blind for sacrifice, it is not evil; or the lame and the sick, it is not evil.* Note, It is a very evil thing, whether men think so or no, to offer the blind and the lame, the torn and the sick, in sacrifice to God. If we worship God ignorantly, and without understanding, we bring the blind for sacrifice; if we do it carelessly, and without consideration, if we are cold, and dull, and dead, in it, we bring the sick; if we rest in the bodily exercise, and do not make heart-work of it, we bring the lame; and, if we suffer vain

thoughts and distractions to lodge within us, we bring the torn. And *is not this evil?* Is it not a great affront to God and a great wrong and injury to our own souls? Do not our books tell us, nay, do not our own hearts tell us, that *this is evil?* for God, who is the best, ought to be served with the best we have. [2.] They would do no more of their work than what they were paid for. The priests would offer the sacrifices that were brought to the altar, because they had their share of them; but as for any other service of the temple, that had not a particular fee belonging to it, they would not stir a step, nor lend a hand, to it; and this was the general temper of them, v. 10. There is not a man among the priests that would *shut the doors, or kindle a fire, for nought.* If he were required to do the smallest piece of service, he would ask, how shall I be paid for it? They would do nothing *gratis*, but were all for what they could get, *every one for his gain, from his quarter*, Isa. lvi. 11. Note, Though God has given order that his servants be well paid in this world, yet those are no acceptable servants to him who are mercenary, and would never do the work but for the wages. [3.] Their work was a perfect drudgery to them (v. 13): *You said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!* Both priests and people were of this mind, that they thought God imposed too hard a task upon them; the people grudged the charge of providing the sacrifice and the priests grudged the pains of offering it; they thought the feasts of the Lord came too thick, and they were forced to attend too often, and too long, in the courts of the Lord; the priests thought it a severe penance imposed upon them to purify themselves as was required when they attended the altar and ate of the holy things; they thought the duty of their office toilsome and troublesome, and *snuffed at it* as unreasonable, and bearing hard upon them; they did it, but it was grudgingly and with reluctance. God speaks of it, in justification of his law, that he had not *made them to serve with an offering, nor wearied them with incense*, Isa. xliii. 23. *Wherein have I wearied thee?* Mic. vi. 3. But their own wicked hearts made it a weariness; and they were, as Doeg, *detained before the Lord*; they would rather have been any where else. Note, Those are highly injurious, both to God and themselves, who are weary of his service and worship, and snuff at it.

III. Observe how God expostulates and reasons the case with them, for their conviction and humiliation. 1. Would they, durst they, affront an earthly prince thus? *You offer to God the lame and the sick; offer it now unto thy governor* (v. 8), either as tribute or as a present, when thou art entreating his favour, or in gratitude for some favour received; *will he be pleased with thee?* Or, rather, will he not take himself to be affronted by it? Note, Those who are care-

less and irreverent in the duties of religious worship should consider what a shame it is to offer that to their God which they would scorn to offer to their governor, to be more observant of the laws of breeding and good manners than of the laws of religion, and more afraid of being rude than of being profane. 2. Could they imagine that such sacrifices as these would be pleasing to God, or answer the end of sacrifices? "*Should I accept this at your hand, saith the Lord? v. 13.* Have you any reason to think I should either not discern or not resent the affront, that I should connive at the violation of my own laws? No (v. 10); *I have no pleasure in you, and therefore I will not accept an offering, such an offering, at your hand.*" If God has no pleasure in the person, if the person be not in a justified state, if he be not sanctified, God will not accept the offering. God had respect to Abel first and then to his sacrifice. Note, In order to our acceptance with God it is not enough to do that which, for the matter of it, is good, but we must do it from a right principle, in a right manner, and for a right end. It was the ancient rule laid down (Gen. iv. 7), *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* Now, if we be not accepted of God, in vain do we worship him; it is all lost labour; nay, we are all undone, for ever undone, if we come short of God's acceptance. Those therefore make a bad bargain for themselves who, to save charges in their religion, miss all the ends of it, and, by thinking to go the nearest way to work, bring nothing to pass. Those who make it the top of their ambition, as we all ought to do, *whether present or absent, to be accepted of the Lord*, will not dare to bring the *torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice*. 3. How could they expect to prevail with God in their intercessions for the people when they thus affronted God in their sacrifices? So some understand v. 9, as spoken ironically, "*And how if you will do the duty of priests, and stand in the gap to turn away the judgments of God that you see ready to pour in upon us, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious to us*, and to our land which is almost eaten up with locusts and caterpillars," as appears ch. iii. 11. "Try now what interest you have at the throne of grace; improve it for the removing of this plague, for it has been by your means; you have provoked God to send it. But as you go on thus to profane his sacred things will he regard your persons or your prayers? No, you cannot prevail with him to command it away." For, *if we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear us*, either for ourselves or for others. 4. Had God deserved this at their hands? No, he had provided comfortably for them, and had given them such encouragement in their work as might have engaged them to do it cheerfully and well; so some understand v. 10, "*Who is there among you that shall shut*

*a door, or kindle a fire, for nought?* No, God does not expect you should serve him for nothing; you are well paid for it, and shall be so; not a cup of cold water, given for the honour of God, shall *lose its reward.*" Note, The consideration of our constant receivings from God, and the present rewards of obedience in obedience, very much aggravates our slothfulness and niggardliness in our returns of duty to God.

IV. He calls them to repentance for their profanations of his holy name. So we may understand v. 9, "*Now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious to us.*" Humble yourselves for your sin, cry mightily to God for pardon, and make up in the faith and fervency of your prayers what has been wanting in the worth and value of your sacrifices; for all the rebukes of Providence we are under *are by your means.*" Note, Those who have by their sins helped to kindle a fire are highly concerned by their repentance, prayers, and personal reformation, to help to quench it. We must see how much God's judgments are by our means, and be awakened thereby to be earnest with him to return in mercy; and, if we take not this course, how can we think he should regard our persons?

V. He declares his resolution both to secure the glory of his own name and to reckon with those who profane it. Those who put contempt upon God and religion, and think to run down sacred things, let them know,

1. That they shall not gain their point. God will magnify his law and make it honourable, though they vilify it and make it contemptible; for (v. 11) *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles.* It might be said, "If these are not the worshippers whom God will accept, then he has no worshippers." As if he must make the best of their service, or else he would have no service done him; and then *what will he do for his great name?* But let him alone for that; *though Israel be not faithful, be not gathered, yet God will be glorious.* Though these priests provoke him to take down the ceremonial economy, and to abolish that *law of commandments*, which could not make the *comers thereunto perfect*, yet he will be no loser by that, at the long run; for, (1.) Instead of those carnal ordinances, which they profaned, a spiritual way of worship shall be introduced and established: *Incense shall be offered to God's name* (which signifies prayer and praise, Ps. cxli. 2; Rev. viii. 3), instead of the blood and fat of bulls and goats. And it shall be a *pure offering*, refined, not only from the corruptions that were in the priests' practice, but from the mere bodily exercise that was in the institutions themselves, which are called *carnal ordinances, imposed till the time of reformation*, Heb. ix. 10. When the hour came in which *the true worshippers worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth*, then



this incense was offered, even this pure offering. (2.) Instead of his being worshipped and served among the Jews only, a small people in a corner of the world, he will be served and worshipped in all places, *from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same; in every place*, in every part of the world, *incense shall be offered to his name*; nations shall be discipled, and shall speak of the wonderful works of God, and have them spoken to them in their own language. This is a plain prediction of that great revolution in the kingdom of grace by which the Gentiles, who had been *strangers and foreigners*, came to be *fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God*, and as welcome to the throne of grace as ever the Jews had been. It is twice said (for the thing was certain), *My name shall be great among the Gentiles*, whereas hitherto in Judah only he was known, and his name was great, Ps. lxxvi.

1. God's name shall be declared to them, the declaration of it shall be received and believed, and there shall be those among the Gentiles who shall magnify and glorify the name of God better than ever the Jews had done, even the priests themselves.

2. That they shall not go unpunished, v. 14. Here is the doom of those who do like these priests, for the sentence on them is a sentence on all such. Observe, (1.) The description of profane and careless worshippers. They are such as *vow and sacrifice to the Lord a corrupt thing* when they have in their flock a male. They have of the best, wherewith to serve and honour him, so bountiful has he been in his gifts to them, but they put him off with the worst, and think that good enough for him, so ungrateful are they in their returns to him. This was the fault of the people, but the priests connived at it, and indulged them in it. We find a distinction in the law which allowed *that to be offered for a free-will offering* which would not be accepted for a vow, Lev. xxii.

23. But the priests would accept it, though God would not, pretending to be more indulgent than he was, for which he will give them no thanks another day. (2.) The character given of such worshippers. They are *deceivers*; they deal falsely and fraudulently with God; they play the hypocrite with him; they pretend to honour him, in making the vow, but, when it comes to be performed, they put an affront upon him, to such a degree that it would have been *better not to have vowed than to vow and thus to pay*; but let not such be themselves deceived, for *God is not mocked*. Those who think to put a cheat upon God will prove, in the end, to have put a damning cheat upon their own souls. Hypocrites are deceivers, and they will prove self-deceivers, and so self-destroyers. (3.) The doom passed upon them: *They are cursed*; they expect a blessing, but will meet with a curse, the tokens of God's wrath, according to the judgment written.

(4.) The reason of this doom: "*For I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and therefore will reckon with those who deal with me but as a man like themselves; my name is dreadful among the heathen, and therefore I will not bear that it should be contemptible among my own people.*" The heathen paid more respect to their gods, though idols, than the Jews did to theirs, though the only true and living God. Note, The consideration of God's universal dominion, and the universal acknowledgment of it, should restrain us from all irreverence in his service.

## CHAP. II.

There are two great ordinances which divine wisdom has instituted, the wretched profanation of both of which is complained of and sharply reprov'd in this chapter. 1. The ordinance of the ministry, which is peculiar to the church, and is designed for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned by those who were themselves dignified with the honour of it and entrusted with the business of it. The priests profaned the holy things of God; this they are here charged with; their sin is aggravated, and they are severely threatened for it, ver. 1—9. 11. The ordinance of marriage, which is common to the world of mankind, and was instituted for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned both by the priests and by the people, in marrying strangers (ver. 11, 12), treating their wives unkindly (ver. 13), putting them away (ver. 16), and herein dealing treacherously, ver. 10, 14, 15. And that which was at the bottom of this and other instances of profaneness was downright atheism, thinking God altogether such a one as themselves, which was, in effect, to say, There is no God, ver. 17. And these reproofs to them are warnings to us.

AND now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. 2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. 3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it. 4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him, for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. 6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. 7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. 9

Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

What was said in the foregoing chapter was directed to the priests (*ch. i. 6*): *Thus saith the Lord of hosts to you, O priests! that despise my name.* But the crimes there charged upon them they were guilty of as sacrificers, and for those they might think it some excuse that they offered what the people brought, and therefore that, if they were not so good as they should be, it was not their fault, but the people's; and therefore here the corruptions there complained of are traced to the source and spring of them—the faults the priests were guilty of as teachers of the people, as expositors of the law and the lively oracles; and this is a part of their office which still remains in the hands of gospel-ministers (who are appointed to be pastors and teachers, like the priests under the law, though not sacrificers, like them), and therefore by them the admonition here is to be particularly regarded. If the priests had given the people better instructions, the people would have brought better offerings; and therefore the blame returns upon the priests: *"And now, O you priests! this commandment is purely for you (v. 1), who should have taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord, and how to worship him aright."* Note, The governors of the churches are under God's government, and to him they are accountable. Even for those who command God has commandments. Nay (*v. 4*), *you shall know that I have sent these commandments for you.* They should know it either, 1. By the power of the Spirit working with the word for their conviction and reformation: *"You shall know its original by its efficacy, whence it comes by what it does."* When the word of God to us brings about, and carries on, the work of God in us, then we cannot but know that he sent it to us, that it is not the word of *Malachi—God's messenger*, but it is indeed the word of God, and is sent, not only in general to all, but in particular to us. Or, 2. By the accomplishment of the threatenings denounced against them: *"You shall know, to your cost, that I have sent this commandment to you, and it shall not return void."*

Let us now see what this commandment is which is for the priests, which, they must know, was sent to them; and let us put into method the particulars of the charge.

I. Here is a recital of the covenant God made with that sacred tribe, which was their commission for their work and the patent of their honour: *The Lord of hosts sent a commandment to them, for the establishing of this covenant (v. 4), for his covenant is said to be the word which he commanded (Ps.*

*cv. 8)*; and he sent *this commandment* by the prophet at this time for the re-establishing of it, that it might not be cut off for their persisting in the violation of it. Let the sons of Levi know then (and particularly the sons of Aaron) what honour God put upon their family, and what a trust he reposed in them (*v. 5*): *My covenant was with him of life and peace.* Besides the covenant of peculiarity made with all the house of Israel, there was a covenant of priesthood made with one family, that they should do the services, and, upon condition of that, should enjoy all the privileges, of the priest's office—that, as Israel was a peculiar nation, a *kingdom of priests*, so the house of Aaron should be a family of priests, set apart for the service and honour of God, to bear up his name in that nation, as they were to bear up his name among the nations; both the one and the other, in different degrees, were to *give glory unto God's name, v. 2.* God covenanted with them as his menial servants, obliged them to do his work and promised to own and accept them in it. This is called *his covenant of life and peace*, because it was intended for the support of religion, which brings life and peace to the souls of men—life to the dead, peace to the distressed, or because life and peace were by this covenant promised to those priests that faithfully and conscientiously discharged their duty; they shall have peace, which implies security from all evil, and life, which comprises the summary of all good. What is here said of the covenant of priesthood is true of the covenant of grace made with all believers, as spiritual priests; it is a covenant of life and peace; it assures all believers of life and peace, everlasting peace, everlasting life, all happiness both in this world and in that to come. This covenant was made with the whole tribe of Levi when they were distinguished from the rest of the tribes, were not numbered with them, but were *taken from among them and appointed over the tabernacle of testimony* (*Num. i. 49, 50*), by virtue of which appointment God says (*Num. iii. 12*), *The Levites shall be mine.* It was made with Aaron when he and his sons were taken to *minister unto the Lord in the priest's office*, *Exod. xxviii. 1.* Aaron is therefore called *the saint of the Lord*, *Ps. cvi. 16.* It was made with Phinehas and his family, a branch of Aaron's, upon a particular occasion, *Num. xxv. 12, 13.* And there the covenant of priesthood is called, as here, the *covenant of peace*, because by it peace was made and kept between God and Israel. These great blessings of life and peace, contained in that covenant, God gave to him, to Levi, to Aaron, to Phinehas; he promised life and peace to them and their posterity, entrusted them with these benefits for the use and behoof of God's Israel; they received that they might give, as Christ himself did, *Ps. lxxviii. 18.* Now, for the further opening of this covenant, observe,



1. The considerations upon which it was grounded: It was *for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name*. The tribe of Levi gave a signal proof of their holy fear of God, and their reverence for his name, when they appeared so bravely against the worshippers of the golden calf (Exod. xxxii. 26); and for their zeal in that matter God bestowed this blessing upon them and invited them to consecrate themselves unto him. Phinehas also showed himself zealous in the fear of God and his judgments when, to stay the plague, he stabbed *Zimri and Cozbi*, Ps. cvi. 30, 31. Note, Those, and those only, who fear God's name, can expect the benefit of the *covenant of life and peace*; and those who give proofs of their zeal for God shall without fail be recompensed in the glorious privileges of the Christian priesthood. Some read this, not as the consideration of the grant, but as the condition of it: *I gave them to him, provided that he should fear before me*. If God grant us life and peace, he expects we should fear before him. 2. The trust that was lodged in the priests by this covenant, v. 7. They were hereby made *the messengers of the Lord of hosts*, messengers of that covenant of life and peace, not mediators of it, but only messengers, or ambassadors, employed to treat of the terms of peace between God and Israel. The priests were *God's mouth* to his people, from whom they must receive instructions according to the lively oracles. This was the office to which Levi was advanced; because, in his zeal for God, he *did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children*, therefore *they shall teach Jacob God's judgments*, Deut. xxxiii. 9, 10. Note, It is an honour to God's servants to be employed as his messengers and to be sent on his errands. Angels have their name thence. Haggai was called *the Lord's messenger*. This being their office, observe, (1.) What is the duty of ministers: *The priests' lips should keep knowledge*, not keep it from the people, but keep it for them. Ministers must be men of knowledge; for how are those able to teach others the things of God who are themselves unacquainted with those things or unready in them? They must keep knowledge, must furnish themselves with it and retain what they have got, that they may be like the *good householder*, who *brings out of his treasury things new and old*. Not only their heads, but their lips, must keep knowledge; they must not only have it, but they must have it ready, must have it at hand, must have it (as we say) at their tongue's end, to be communicated to others as there is occasion. Thus we read of *wisdom in the lips of him that has understanding*, with which *they feed many*, Prov. x. 13, 21. (2.) What is the duty of the people: *They should seek the law at his mouth*; they should consult the priests as God's messengers, and not only hear the message, but ask questions upon it,

that they may the better understand it and that mistakes concerning it may be prevented and rectified. We are all concerned fully to know *what the will of the Lord is*, to know it distinctly and certainly; we should be desirous to know it and therefore inquisitive concerning it. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* We must not only consult the written word (*to the law and to the testimony*), but must have recourse to God's messengers, and desire instruction and advice from them in the affairs of our souls as we do from physicians and lawyers concerning our bodies and estates. Not but that ministers ought to lay down the law of God to those who do not enquire concerning it, or desire the knowledge of it (they must *instruct those that oppose themselves*, 2 Tim. ii. 25, as well as those that offer themselves), but it is people's duty to apply to them for instruction, not only to hear, but to ask questions. *Watchman, what of the night?* Thus *if you will enquire, enquire you*; see Isa. xxi. 8, 11, 12. People should not only seek comfort at the mouth of their ministers, but should seek the law there; for, if we be found in the way of duty, we shall find it the way of comfort.

II. Here is a memorial of the fidelity and zeal of many of their predecessors in the priest's office, which are mentioned as an aggravation of their sin in degenerating from such honourable ancestors and deserting such illustrious examples, and as a justification of God in withdrawing from them those tokens of his presence which he had granted to those that kept close to him. See here (v. 6) how good the godly priest was, whose steps they should have trod in, and what good he did, God's grace working with him. 1. See how good he was. He was ready and mighty in the scriptures: *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for the use of those that *asked the law at his mouth*; and in all his discourses there appeared more or less of the law of truth. Every thing he said was under the government of that law, and with it he governed others. He spoke as one having authority (every word was a law), and as one that had both wisdom and integrity—it was a *law of truth*, and truth is a law, it has a commanding power. It is by truth that Christ rules. *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for his resolutions of cases of conscience proposed to him were such as might be depended upon; his opinion was good law. *Iniquity was not found in his lips*; he did not *handle the word of God deceitfully*, to please men, to serve a turn, or to make an interest for himself, but told all that consulted him what the law was, whether it were pleasing or displeasing. He did not pronounce that unclean which was clean, nor that clean which was unclean, as one of the rabbin expounds it. And his conversation was of a piece with his doctrine. God himself gives him this honourable testimony: *He walked with me in peace and equity*. He

did not think it enough to talk of God, but he walked with him. The temper of his mind, and the tenour of his life, were of a piece with his doctrine and profession; he lived a life of communion with God, and made it his constant care and business to please him; he lived like a priest that was chosen to *walk before God*, 1 Sam. ii. 30. His conversation was quiet; he was meek and *gentle towards all men*, was a pattern and promoter of love; he walked with God in peace, was himself peaceable and a great peace-maker. His conversation was also honest; he did no wrong to any, but made conscience of rendering to all their due: *He walked with me in equity*, or rectitude. We must not, for peace-sake, transgress the rules of equity, but must keep the peace as far as is consistent with justice. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable*. Ministers, of all men, are concerned to *walk with God in peace and equity*, that they may be *examples to the flock*. 2. See what good he did; he answered the ends of his advancement to that office: *He did turn many away from iniquity*; he made it his business to do good, and God crowned his endeavours with wonderful success; he helped to save many a soul from death, and there are multitudes now in heaven blessing God that ever they knew him. Ministers must lay out themselves to the utmost for the conversion of sinners, and even among those that have the name of Israelites there is need of conversion-work, there are many to be turned from iniquity; and they must reckon it an honour, and a rich reward of their labour, if they may but be instrumental herein. It is God only that by his grace can turn men from iniquity, and yet it is here said of a pious laborious minister that he turned men from iniquity, as a worker together with God, and an instrument in his hand; and *those that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars*, Dan. xii. 3. Note, Those ministers, and those only, are likely to turn men from iniquity, that preach sound doctrine and live good lives, and both according to the scripture; for, as one of the rabbins observes here, *When the priest is upright many will be upright*.

III. Here is a high charge drawn up against the priests of the present age, who violated the covenant of the priesthood and went directly contrary both to the rules and to the examples that were set before them. Many particulars of their sins we had in the foregoing chapter, and we find (Neh. xiii.) that many corruptions had crept into the church of the Jews at this time, mixed marriages, admitting strangers into the house of God, profanation of the sabbath-day, which were all owing to the carelessness and unfaithfulness of the priests; here it is charged upon them in general, 1. That they transgressed the rule: *You have departed out of the way* (v. 8), out of the good way which

God has prescribed to you, and which your godly ancestors walked before you in. It is ill with a people when those whose office it is to guide them in the way do themselves depart out of it: *"You have not kept my ways, not kept in them yourselves, nor done your part to keep others in them,"* v. 9. 2. That they betrayed their trust: *"You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, have violated it, have contradicted the great intentions of it, and have done what in you lay to frustrate and defeat them; you have managed your office as if it were designed only to feed you fat and make you great, and not for the glory of God and the good of the souls of men."* This was a corrupting of the covenant of Levi; it was perverting the ends of the office, and making it subservient to those sensual secular things over which it ought always to have dominion. And thus they forfeited the benefit of that covenant, and corrupted it to themselves; they *made it void*, and lost the life and peace which were by it settled upon them. We have no reason to expect God should perform his part of the covenant if we do not make conscience of performing ours. Another instance of their betraying their trust was that they were *partial in the law*, v. 9. In the law given to them they would pick and choose their duty; this they would do and that they would not do, just as they pleased; this is the fashion of hypocrites, while those whose hearts are upright with God have a *respect to all his commandments*. Or, rather, in the law they were to lay down to the people; in this they *knew faces* (so the word is); they *accepted persons*; they wilfully misinterpreted and misapplied the law, either to cross those they had a spleen against or to countenance those they had a kindness for; they would wink at those sins in some which in others they would be sharp upon, according as their interest or inclination led them. God is *no respecter of persons* in making his law, nor will he in reckoning for the breach of it; he *regards not the rich more than the poor*, and therefore his priests, his ministers, misrepresent him, and do him a great deal of dishonour, if, in doctrine or discipline, they be respecters of persons. See 1 Tim. v. 21. 3. That they did a great deal of mischief to the souls of men, which they should have helped to save: *You have caused many to stumble at the law, not only to fall in the law* (as the margin reads it) by transgressing it, taught and encouraged to do so by the examples of the priests, but to *stumble at the law*, by contracting prejudices against it, as if the law were the minister of sin and gave countenance to it. Thus Hophni and Phinehas by their wickedness *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*, 1 Sam. ii. 17. There are many to whom the law of God is a *stumbling-block*, the gospel of Christ a *savour of death unto death*, and Christ himself a



rock of offence; and nothing contributes more to this than the vicious lives of those that make a profession of religion, by which men are tempted to say, "It is all a jest." This is properly a scandal, a stone of stumbling; there is no good reason why it should be so to any, but woe to those by whom this offence comes. 4. That, when they were under the rebukes both of the word and of the providence of God for it, they would not hear, that is, they would not heed, they would not lay it to heart; they were not at all grieved or shamed for their sin, nor affected with the tokens of God's displeasure which they were under. What we hear does us no good unless we lay it to heart and admit the impressions of it: *You will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name*, by repentance and reformation. Therefore we should lay to heart the things of God, that we may give glory to the name of God, may praise him in and for all that whereby he has made himself known. It is bad in any to rob God of his honour, but worst in ministers, whose office and business it is to bear up his name and to give him the glory due to it.

IV. Here is a record of the judgments God had brought upon these priests for their profaneness, and their profanation of holy things. 1. They had lost their comfort (v. 2): *I have already cursed your blessings*. They had not the comfort of their work, which is the satisfaction of doing good; for the blessings with which they, as priests, blessed the people, God was so far from saying *Amen* to that he turned them into curses, as he did Balaam's curses into blessings. That profane people should not have the favour of receiving God's blessings, nor those profane priests the honour of conferring and conveying them, but both should lie under the tokens of his wrath. Nor had they the comfort of their wages, for the blessings with which God blessed them were turned into a curse to them by their abuse of them; they could not receive them as the gifts of his favour when they had made themselves so obnoxious to his displeasure by not laying to heart the reproofs given them. 2. They had lost their credit (v. 9): *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people*. While they glorified God he dignified them and supported their reputation, and a great interest they had in the love and esteem of the people while they did their duty and walked with God in peace and equity; every one had a value and veneration for them; they were truly styled *the reverend, the priests*; but when they forsook the ways of God, and corrupted the covenant of Levi, they thereby made themselves not only mean, but vile, in the eyes even of the common people, who, the more they honoured the order, the more they hated the men that were a dishonour to it. Their conduct, their misconduct, had a direct tendency to this, and God owns his hand

in it, and will have it looked upon as a just judgment of his upon them, and not only produced by their sin but answering to it; they put dishonour upon God, and made his table and the fruit thereof contemptible (ch. i. 12), and therefore God justly put dishonour upon them, and made them contemptible; they exposed themselves, and therefore God exposed them. Note, As sin is a reproach to any people, so especially to priests; there is not a more despicable animal upon the face of the earth than a profane, wicked, scandalous minister.

V. Here is a sentence of wrath passed upon them; and this the prophet begins with, v. 2, 3. But it is conditional: *If you will not lay it to heart*, implying, "If you will, God's anger shall be turned away, and all shall be well; but, if you persist in these wicked courses, hear your doom—Your sin will be your ruin." 1. They shall fall and lie under the curse of God: *I will send a curse upon you*. The wrath of God shall be revealed against them, according to the threatenings of the written word. Note, Those who violate the commands of the law lay themselves under the curses of the law. 2. Neither their employments nor their enjoyments, as priests, shall be clean to them: *"I will curse your blessings, so that you shall neither be blessed yourselves nor blessings to the people, but even your plenty shall be a plague to you and you shall be plagues to your generation."* 3. The fruits of the earth, which they had the tithe of, should be no comfort to them: *"Behold, I will corrupt your seed; the corn you sow shall rot under ground and never come up again, the consequence of which must needs be famine and scarcity of provisions; so that no meat-offerings shall be brought to the altar, which the priests will soon have a loss of."* Or it may be understood of the seed of the word which they preached; God threatens to deny his blessing to the instructions they gave the people, so that their labour shall be lost, as that of the husbandman is when the seed is corrupt; and so it agrees with that threatening (Jer. xxiii. 32), *They shall not profit this people at all*. 4. They and their services shall be rejected of God; he will be so far from taking any pleasure in them that he will loathe and detest them: *I will spread dung in your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts*. He refers to the sacrifices that were offered at those feasts. Instead of being himself pleased with the fat of their sacrifices, he will show himself displeased by throwing the dung of them in their faces, which he does, in effect, when he says, *Bring no more vain oblations; your incense is an abomination to me*. Note, Those who rest in their external performances of religion, when they should count but dung, that they may win Christ, shall not only come short of acceptance with God in them, but shall be filled with shame and confusion for

their folly. 5. All will end, at last, in their utter ruin: *One shall take you away with it.* They shall be so overspread with the dung of their sacrifices that they shall be carried away with it to the dunghill, as a part of it. Any one shall serve to take you away, the common scavenger. *Reprobate silver shall men call them, and treat them accordingly, because the Lord has rejected them.*

10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. 12 The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. 13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand. 14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet *is* she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15 And did not he make one? yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for *one* covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. 17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied *him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where *is* the God of judgment?

Corrupt practices are the genuine fruit

and product of corrupt principles; and the badness of men's hearts and lives is owing to some loose atheistical notions which they have got and which they govern themselves by. Now, in these verses, we have an instance of this; we here find men dealing falsely with one another, and it is because they think falsely of their God. Observe,

1. How corrupt their practices were. In general, they *dealt treacherously every man against his brother*, v. 10. It cannot be expected that he who is false to his God should be true to his friend. They had dealt treacherously with God in his tithes and offerings, and had defrauded him, and thus conscience was debauched, its bonds and cords were broken, a door was opened to all manner of injustice and dishonesty, and the bonds of relation and natural affection are broken through likewise and no difficulty made of it. Some think that the treacherous dealings here reproved are the same with those instances of oppression and extortion which we find complained of to Nehemiah about this time, Neh. v. 3—7. Therein they forgot the God of their fathers, and the covenant of their fathers, and rendered their offerings unacceptable, Isa. i. 11. But it seems rather to refer to what was amiss in their marriages, which was likewise complained of, Neh. xiii. 23. Two things they are here charged with, as very provoking to God in this matter—taking strange wives of heathen nations, and abusing and putting away the wives they had of their own nation; in both these they dealt treacherously and violated a sacred covenant; the former was in contempt of the covenant of peculiarity, the latter of the marriage-covenant.

1. In contempt of the covenant God made with Israel, as a peculiar people to himself, they married strange wives, which was expressly prohibited, and provided against, in that covenant, Deut. vii. 3. Observe here,

(1.) What good reason they had to deal faithfully with God and one another in this covenant, and not to make marriages with the heathen. [1.] They were expressly bound out from such marriages by covenant. God engaged to do them good upon this condition, that they should not mingle with the heathen; this was the *covenant of their fathers*, the covenant made with their fathers, denoting the antiquity and the authority of it, and its being the great charter by which that nation was incorporated. They lay under all possible obligations to observe it strictly, yet they profaned it, as if they were not bound by it. Those profane the covenant of their fathers who live in disobedience to the command of the God of their fathers. [2.] They were a peculiar people, united in one body, and therefore ought to have united for the preserving of the honour of their peculiarity: *Have we not all one Father?* Yes, we have, *for has not one God created us?* Are we not all *his offspring*? And are we not



made of one blood? Yes, certainly we are. God is a common Father to all mankind, and, upon that account, *all we are brethren*, members one of another, and therefore ought to *put away lying* (Eph. iv. 25), and not to *deal treacherously*, no, not *any man against his brother*. But here it seems to refer to the Jewish nation: *Have we not all one father*, Abraham, or Jacob? This they prided themselves in, *We have Abraham to our father*; but here it is turned upon them as an aggravation of their sin in betraying the honour of their nation by intermarrying with heathens: "*Has not one God created us*, that is, formed us into a people, made us a nation by ourselves, and put a life into us, distinct from that of other nations? And should not this oblige us to maintain the dignity of our character?" Note, The consideration of the unity of the church in Christ, its founder and Father, should engage us carefully to preserve the purity of the church and to guard against all corruptions. [3.] They were dedicated to God, as well as distinguished from the neighbouring nations. *Israel was holiness to the Lord* (Jer. ii. 3), taken into covenant with him, set apart by him for himself, to be to him for a name and a praise, and upon this account he *loved them* and delighted in them; the sanctuary set up among them was the *holiness of the Lord, which he loved*, of which he said, *It is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it*; but by marrying strange wives they profaned this holiness, and laid the honour of it in the dust. Note, Those who are devoted to God, and beloved of him, are concerned to preserve their integrity, that they may not throw themselves out of his love, nor lose the honour, or defeat the end, of their dedication to him.

(2.) How treacherously they dealt, notwithstanding. They profaned themselves in that very thing which was prescribed to them for the preserving of the honour of their singularity: *Judah has married the daughter of a strange god*. The harm was not so much that she was the daughter of a strange nation (God has made *all nations of men*, and is himself *King of nations*), but that she was the daughter of a strange god, trained up in the service and worship of false gods, at their disposal, as a daughter at her father's disposal, and having a dependence upon them; hence some of the rabbins (quoted by Dr. Pocock) say, *He that marries a heathen woman is as if he made himself son-in-law to an idol*. The corruption of the old world began with the intermarriages of the *sons of God with the daughters of men*, Gen. vi. 2. It is the same thing that is here complained of, but as it is expressed it sounds worse: *The sons of God married the daughters of a strange god*. Herein Judah is said to have *dealt treacherously*, for they basely betrayed their own honour and *profaned that holiness of the Lord which they should have*

*loved* (so some read it); and it is said to be *an abomination committed in Israel and in Jerusalem*; it was hateful to God, and very unbecoming those that were called by his name. Note, It is an abominable thing for those who profess the holiness of the Lord to profane it, particularly by yoking themselves unequally with unbelievers.

(3.) How severely God would reckon with them for it (v. 12): *The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this*, that marries the daughter of a strange god. He has, in effect, cut himself off from the holy nation, and joined in with foreigners and *aliens to the commonwealth of Israel*, and so shall his doom be; *God will cut him off, him and all that belong to him*; so the original intimates. He shall be cut off from Israel and from Jerusalem, and not be *written among the living* there. The Lord will cut off both *the master and the scholar*, that are guilty of this sin, both the teachers and the taught. The blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch, *both him that wakeneth and him that answereth* (so it is in the margin), for the master calls up his scholar to his business, and stirs him up in it. They shall be cut off together *out of the tabernacles of Jacob*. God will no more own them as belonging to his nation; nay, and the priest that *offers an offering to the Lord*, if he marry a strange wife (as we find many of the priests did, Ezra x. 18), shall not escape; the offering he offers shall not atone for him, but he shall be cut off from the temple of the Lord, as others from the tabernacles of Jacob. *Nehemiah chased away from him*, and from the priesthood, one of the sons of the high priest, whom he found guilty of this sin, Neh. xiii. 28.

2. In contempt of the marriage-covenant, which God instituted for the common benefit of mankind, they abused and put away the wives they had of their own nation, probably to make room for those strange wives, when it was all the fashion to marry such (v. 13): *This also have you done*; this is the second article of the charge. For the way of sin is down-hill, and one violation of the covenant is an inlet to another.

(1.) Let us see what it is that is here complained of. They did not behave as they ought to have done towards their wives. [1.] They were cross with them, froward and peevish, and made their lives bitter to them, so that when they came with their wives and families to worship God at the solemn feasts, which they should have done with rejoicing, they were all out of humour; the poor wives were ready to break their hearts, and, not daring to make their case known to any other, they complained to God, and *covered the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying*. This is illustrated by the instance of Hannah, who, upon the account of her husband's having another wife (though otherwise a kind husband), and the discon-

tent thence arising, whenever they went up to the house of the Lord to worship *fretted and wept*, and was in *bitterness of soul*, and *would not eat*, 1 Sam. i. 6, 7, 10. So it was with these wives here; and this was so contrary to the cheerfulness which God requires in his worshippers that it spoiled the acceptableness of their devotions: God *regards not their offering any more*. See here what a good Master we serve, who will not have his altar covered with tears, but compassed with songe. This condemns those who left his worship for that of idols, among the rites of which we find *women weeping for Tammuz* (Ezek. viii. 14), and the blood of the worshippers gushing out upon the altar, 1 Kings xviii. 28. See also what a wicked thing it is to put others out of frame for the cheerful worship of God; though it is their fault by their fretfulness to indispose themselves for their duty, yet it is much more the fault of those who *provoked them to make them to fret*. It is a reason given why yoke-fellows should live in holy love and joy—that *their prayers may not be hindered*, 1 Pet. iii. 7. [2.] They dealt treacherously with them, v. 14—16. They did not perform their promises to them, but defrauded them of their maintenance or dower, or took in concubines, to share in the affection that was due to their wives only. [3.] They *put them away*, gave them a bill of divorce, and turned them off, nay, perhaps they did it without the ceremony that the law of Moses prescribed, v. 16. [4.] In all this *they covered violence with their garment*; they abused their wives, and were vexatious to them, and yet, in the sight of others, they pretended to be very loving to them and tender of them, and to cast a skirt over them. It is common for those who do violence to advance some specious pretence or other wherewith to cover it as with a garment.

(2.) Let us see the proof and aggravations of the charge. [1.] It is sufficiently proved by the testimony of God himself: "*The Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth* (v. 14), has been witness to the marriage-covenant between thee and her, for to him you appealed concerning your sincerity in it and fidelity to it; he has been a witness to all the violations of it, and all thy treacherous dealings in contempt of it, and is ready to judge between thee and her." Note, This should engage us to be faithful both to God and to all with whom we have to do, that God himself is a witness both to all our covenants and to all our covenant-breaches; and he is a witness against whom there lies no exception. [2.] It is highly aggravated by the consideration of the person wronged and abused. First, "*She is thy wife*"; thy own, bone of thy bone and flesh of thy flesh, the nearest to thee of all the relations thou hast in the world, and to cleave to whom thou must quit the rest." Secondly, "*She is the wife of thy youth*, who

had thy affections when they were at the strongest, was thy first choice, and with whom thou hast lived long. Let not the darling of thy youth be the scorn and loathing of thy age." Thirdly, "*She is thy companion*"; she has long been an equal sharer with thee in thy cares, and griefs, and joys." The wife is to be looked upon, not as a servant, but as a companion to the husband, with whom he should freely converse and *take sweet counsel*, as with a friend, and in whose company he should take delight more than in any other's; for *is she not appointed to be thy companion?* Fourthly, "*She is the wife of thy covenant*, to whom thou art so firmly bound that, while she continues faithful, thou canst not be loosed from her, for it was a covenant for life. It is the wife with whom thou hast covenanted, and who has covenanted with thee; there is an oath of God between you, which is not to be trifled with, is not to be played fast and loose with." Married people should often call to mind their marriage-vows, and review them with all seriousness, as those that make conscience of performing what they promised.

(3.) Let us see the reasons given why man and wife should continue together, to their lives' end, in holy love and peace, and neither quarrel with each other nor separate from each other. [1.] Because God has joined them together (v. 15): *Did not he make one*, one live for one Adam, that Adam might never *take another to her to vex her* (Lev. xviii. 18), nor put her away to make room for another? It is great wickedness to complain of the law of marriage as a confinement, when Adam in innocency, in honour, in Eden, in the garden of pleasure, was confined to one. Yet *God had the residue of the Spirit*; he could have made another Eve, as amiable as that he did make, but, designing *Adam a help meet for him*, he made him *one wife*; had he made him more, he would not have had a *meet help*. And wherefore did he make but one woman for one man? It was *that he might seek a godly seed—a seed of God* (so the word is), a seed that should bear the image of God, be employed in the service of God, and be devoted to his glory and honour,—that *every man having his own wife*, and *but one*, according to the law, (1 Cor. vii. 2), they might live in chaste and holy love, under the directions and restraints of the divine law, and not, as brute beasts, under the dominion of lust, and thus might propagate the nature of man in such a way as might make it most likely to participate of a divine nature,—that the children, being born in holy matrimony, which is an ordinance of God, and by which the inclinations of nature are kept under the regulations of God's command, might thus be made a *seed to serve him*, and be bred, as they are born, under his direction and dominion. Note, The raising up of a godly seed, which shall be accounted to



the Lord for a generation, is one great end of the institution of marriage; but that is a good reason why the marriage-bed should be kept undefiled and the marriage bond inviolable. Husbands and wives must therefore live in the fear of God, that their seed may be a godly seed, else were they *unclean*, but now they are holy, as children of the covenant, the marriage-covenant, which was a type of the covenant of grace, and the conjugal union, when thus preserved untire, of the mystical union between Christ and his church, in which he seeks and secures to himself a godly seed; see Eph. v. 25, 32. [2.] Because he is much displeased with those who go about to put asunder what he has joined together (v. 16): *The God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away*. He hath indeed permitted it to the Jews, for the hardness of their hearts, or, rather, limited and clogged it (Matt. xix. 8); but he hated it, especially as those practised it who put away their wives for every cause, Matt. xix. 3. Let those wives that elope from their husbands and put themselves away, those husbands that are cruel to their wives and turn them away, or take their affections off from their wives and place them upon others, yea, and those husbands and wives that live asunder by consent, for want of love to each other, let such as these know that the God of Israel hates such practices, however vain men may make a jest of them.

(4.) Let us see the caution inferred from all this. We have it twice (v. 15): *Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth*; and again, v. 16. Note, Those that would be kept from sin must take heed to their spirits, for there all sin begins; they must keep their hearts with all diligence, must keep a jealous eye upon them and a strict hand, and must watch against the first risings of sin there. We shall act as we are spirited; and therefore, that we may regulate our actions, we must consider *what manner of spirit we are of*; we must take heed to our spirits with reference to our particular relations, and see that we stand rightly affected to them and be of a good temper, for otherwise we shall be in danger of dealing treacherously. If our own hearts deal treacherously with us, whom will they not deal treacherously with?

II. Observe how corrupt their principles were, to which were owing all these corrupt practices. Let us trace up the streams to the fountain (v. 17): *You have wearied the Lord with your words*. They thought to evade the convictions of the word, and to justify themselves by cavilling with God's proceedings; but their defence was their offence, and their vindication of themselves was the aggravation of their crime; they affronted the Lord with their words, and repeated them so often, and persisted so long in their contradictions, that they even wearied him; see

Isa. vii. 13. They made him weary of doing them good as he had done, and stopped the current of his favours; or they represented him as weary of governing the world, and willing to quit it and lay aside the care of it. Note, It is a wearisome thing, even to God himself, to hear people insist upon their own justification in their corrupt and wicked practices, and plead their atheistical principles in vindication of them. But, as if God by his prophet had done them wrong, see how impudently they ask, *Wherein have we wearied him?* What are those vexatious words whereby we have wearied him? Note, Sinful words are more offensive to the God of heaven than they are commonly thought to be. But God has his proofs ready; two things they had said, at least in their hearts (and thoughts are words to God), with which they had wearied him:—1. They had denied him to be a holy God, and had asserted that concerning him which is directly contrary to the doctrine of his holiness. As he is a holy God, he hates sin, *is of purer eyes than to behold it, and cannot endure to look upon it*, Hab. i. 13. He is not a God that has pleasure in wickedness, Ps. v. 4. And yet they had the impudence to say, in direct contradiction to this, *Every one that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them*. This wicked inference they drew, without any reason, from the prosperity of sinners in their sinful courses (see ch. iii. 15), as if God's love or hatred were to be known by that which is before us, and those must be concluded good in the sight of the Lord who are rich in the world. Or this they said because they wished it might be so; they were resolved to do evil, and yet to think themselves good in the sight of the Lord, and to believe that he delighted in them, notwithstanding; and therefore, under pretence of making God not so severe as he was commonly represented, they said as they would have it, and thought he was altogether such a one as themselves. Note, Those who think God a friend to sin affront him and deceive themselves. 2. They had denied him to be the righteous governor of the world. If he did not delight in sin and sinners, yet it would serve their turn to believe that he would never punish it or them. They said, "*Where is the God of judgment?*" That God who, we have been so often told, would call us to an account, and reckon with us for what we have said and done—where is he? He has forsaken the earth, and takes no notice of what is said and done there; he has said that he will come to judgment; but where is the promise of his coming? We may do what we please; he sees us not, nor will regard us." It is such a challenge to the Judge of the whole earth as bids defiance to his justice, and, in effect, dares him to do his worst. Such scoffers as these there were in the latter days of the Jewish church, and such there shall be in the latter days of the

Christian church; but their unbelief shall not make the promise of God of no effect; for the day of the Lord will come. *Behold, the Judge stands before the door; the God of judgment is at hand.*

## CHAP. III.

In this chapter we have, I. A promise of the coming of the Messiah, and of his forerunner; and the errand he comes upon is here particularly described, both the comfort which his coming brings to his church and people and the terror which it will bring to the wicked, ver. 1—6. II. A reproof of the Jews for their corrupting God's ordinances and sacrilegiously robbing him of his dues, with a charge to them to amend this matter, and a promise that, if they did, God would return in mercy to them, ver. 7—12. III. A description of the wickedness of the wicked that speak against God (ver. 13—15), and of the righteousness of the righteous that speak for him, with the precious promises made to them, ver. 16—18.

**B**EHOOLD, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. 2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. 4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. 5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts. 6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

The first words of this chapter seem a direct answer to the profane atheistical demand of the scoffers of those days which closed the foregoing chapter: *Where is the God of judgment?* To which it is readily answered, "Here he is; he is just at the door; the long-expected Messiah is ready to appear; and he says, *For judgment have I come into this world*, for that judgment which you have so impudently bid defiance to." One of the rabbins says that the meaning of this is, That God will raise up a righteous King, to set things in order, even the king Messiah. And the beginning of the gospel of

Christ is expressly said to be the accomplishment of this promise, with which the Old Testament concludes, Mark i. 1, 2. So that by this the two Testaments are, as it were, tacked together, and made to answer one another. Now here we have,

I. A prophecy of the appearing of his forerunner John the Baptist, which the prophet Isaiah had foretold (*ch. xl. 3*), as the *preparing of the way of the Lord*, to which this seems to have a reference, for the words of the latter prophets confirmed those of the former: *Behold, I will send my messenger, or I do send him, or I am sending him.* "I am determined to send him; he will now shortly come, and will not come unsent, though to a careless generation he comes unsent for." Observe, 1. He is *God's messenger*; that is his office; he is *Malachi* (so the word is), the same with the name of this prophet; he is *my angel, my ambassador*. John Baptist had his commission *from heaven, and not of men*. All held John Baptist for a prophet, for he was God's messenger, as the prophets were, and came on the same errand to the world that they were sent upon—to call men to repentance and reformation. 2. He is Christ's harbinger: *He shall prepare the way before me*, by calling men to those duties which qualify them to receive the comforts of the Messiah and his coming, and by taking them off from a confidence in their relation to Abraham as *their father* (which, they thought, would serve their turn without a saviour), and by giving notice that the Messiah was now at hand, and so raising men's expectations of him, and making them readily to go into the measures he would take for the setting up of his kingdom in the world. Note, God observes a method in his work, and, before he comes, takes care to have his way prepared. This is like the giving of a sign. The church was told, long before, that the Messiah would come; and here it is added that, a little before he appears, there shall be a signal given; a great prophet shall arise, that shall give notice of his approach, and call to the everlasting gates and doors to *lift up their heads* and give him admission. The accomplishment of this is a proof that *Jesus is the Christ*, is he that *should come*, and we are to *look for no other*; for there was such a messenger sent before him, who *made ready a people prepared for the Lord*, Luke i. 17. The Jewish writers run into gross absurdities to evade the conviction of this evidence; some of them say that this messenger is the *angel of death*, who shall take the wicked out of this life, to be sent into hell torments; others of them say that it is Messiah the son of Joseph, who shall appear before Messiah the son of David; others, this prophet himself; others, an angel from heaven: such mistakes do those run into that will not receive the truth.

II. A prophecy of the appearing of the



Messiah himself: "*The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the God of judgment, who, you think, has forsaken the earth, and you wot not what has become of him.*" The Messiah has been long called *he that should come*, and you may assure yourselves that now shortly he will come." 1. He is *the Lord—Adonai*, the basis and foundation on which the world is founded and fastened, the ruler and governor of all, that one *Lord over all* (Acts x. 36) that has all power committed to him (Matt. xxviii. 18) and is to *reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, Luke i. 33. 2. He is the *Messenger of the covenant*, or the *angel of the covenant*, that *blessed one* that was sent from heaven to negotiate a peace, and settle a correspondence, between God and man. He is the *angel*, the *archangel*, the Lord of the angels, who received commission from the Father to bring man home to God by a covenant of grace, who had revolted from him by the violation of the covenant of innocency. Christ is the *angel of this covenant*, by whose mediation it is brought about and established, as God's covenant with Israel was made by the *disposition of angels*, Acts vii. 53; Gal. iii. 19. Christ, as a prophet, is the *messenger and mediator* of the covenant; nay, he is *given for a covenant*, Isa. xlix. 8. That covenant which is all our *salvation began to be spoken by the Lord*, Heb. ii. 3. Though he is the *prince of the covenant* (as some read this) yet he condescended to be the *messenger of it*, that we might have full assurance of God's good-will towards man, upon his word. 3. He it is *whom you seek, whom you delight in*, whom the pious Jews expect and desire, and whose coming they think of with a great deal of pleasure. In looking and waiting for him, they *looked for redemption in Jerusalem and waited for the consolation of Israel*, Luke ii. 25, 38. Christ was to be the *desire of all nations*, desirable to all (Hag. ii. 7); but he was *the desire* of the Jewish nation actually, because they had the promise of his coming made to them. Note, Those that seek Jesus shall find pleasure in him. If he be our heart's desire he will be our heart's delight; and we have reason to delight in him who is the *messenger of the covenant*, and to bid him welcome who came to us on so kind an errand. 4. He *shall suddenly come*; his coming draws nigh, and we see it not at so great a distance as the patriarchs saw it at. Or, He shall come immediately after the appearing of John Baptist, shall even tread on the heels of his forerunner; when that *morning-star* appears, believe that the *Sun of righteousness* is not far off. Or, He *shall come suddenly*, that is, he shall come when by many he is not looked for; as his second coming will be, so his first coming was, *at midnight*, when some had done looking for him, *for shall he find faith on the earth?* Luke xviii. 8. The Jews reckon

the Messiah among the things that come *unawares*; so Dr. Pocock. And the coming of the Son of man in his day is said to be *as the lightning*, which is very surprising, Luke xvii. 24. 5. He *shall come to his temple*, this temple at Jerusalem, which was lately built, that *latter house* which he was to be the glory of. It is his temple, for it is *his Father's house*, John ii. 16. Christ, at forty days old, was presented in the temple, and thither Simeon went *by the Spirit*, according to the direction of this prophecy, to see him, Luke ii. 27. At twelve years old he was in the temple *about his Father's business*, Luke ii. 49. When he rode in triumph into Jerusalem, it should seem that he went directly to the temple (Matt. xxi. 12), and (v. 14) thither the *blind and the lame* came to him to be healed; there he often preached, and often disputed, and often wrought miracles. By this it appears that the Messiah was to come while *that temple* was standing; that, therefore, being long since destroyed, we must conclude that he has come, and we are to look for no other. Note, Those that would be acquainted with Christ and obtain his favour must meet him in his temple, for there he *records his name* and there he will bless his people. There we must receive his oracles and there we must pay our homage. 6. The promise of his coming is repeated and ratified: *Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts*; you may depend upon his word, who cannot lie, *he shall come, he will come, he will not tarry*.

III. An account given of the great ends and intentions of his coming, v. 2. He is one whom they seek, and one whom they delight in; and yet *who may abide the day of his coming?* It is a thing to be thought of with great seriousness, and with a holy awe and reverence; for *who shall stand when he appears*, though he comes not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life? This may refer,

1. To the terrors of his appearance. Even in the days of his flesh there were some emanations of his glory and power, such as none could stand before, witness his transfiguration, and the prodigies that attended his death; and we read of some that trembled before him, as Mark v. 33.

2 To the troublous times that should follow soon after. The Jewish doctors speak of the *pangs or griefs* of the Messiah, meaning (they say) the great afflictions that should be to Israel at the time of his coming; he himself speaks of great tribulation then approaching, *such as was not since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be*, Matt. xxiv. 21.

3. To the trial which his coming would make of the children of men. *He shall be like a refiner's fire*, which separates between the gold and the dross by melting the ore, or *lik fuller's soop*, which with much rubbing fetches the spots out of the cloth. Christ came to discover men, *that the thoughts of many hearts*

might be revealed (Luke ii. 35), to distinguish men, to separate between the precious and the vile, for his fan in his hand (Matt. iii. 12), to send fire on the earth, not peace, but rather division (Luke xii. 49, 51), to shake heaven and earth, that the wicked might be shaken out (Job xxxviii. 13) and that the things which cannot be shaken might remain, Heb. xii. 27. See what the effect of the trial will be that shall be made by the gospel.

(1.) The gospel shall work good upon those that are disposed to be good, to them it shall be a savour of life unto life (v. 3): *He shall sit as a refiner.* Christ by his gospel shall purify and reform his church, and by his Spirit working with it shall regenerate and cleanse particular souls; for to this end he gave himself for the church, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word* (Eph. v. 26) and *purify to himself a peculiar people*, Tit. ii. 14. Christ is the great refiner. Observe, [1.] Who they are that he will purify—the sons of Levi, all those that are devoted to his praise and employed in his service, as the tribe of Levi was, and whom he designs to make unto our God spiritual priests (Rev. i. 6), a *holy priesthood*, 1 Pet. ii. 5. Note, All true Christians are sons of Levi, set apart for God, to do the service of his sanctuary, and to *war the good warfare*. [2.] How he will purify them; he will *purge them as gold and silver*, that is, he will sanctify them inwardly; he will not only wash away the spots they have contracted from without, but will take away the dross that is found in them; he will separate from them their indwelling corruptions, which rendered their faculties worthless and useless, and so make them like gold refined, both valuable and serviceable. *He will purge them with fire, as gold and silver are purged, for he baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire* (Matt. iii. 11), with the Holy Ghost working like fire. He will purge them by *afflictions and manifold temptations*, that the trial of their faith may be found to praise and honour, 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. He will purge them so as to make them a precious people to himself. [3.] What will be the effect of it: *That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness*, that is, that they may be in sincerity converted to God and consecrated to his praise (hence we read of the *offering up, or sacrificing, of the Gentiles* to God, when they were sanctified by the holy Ghost, Rom. xv. 16), and that they may in a spiritual manner worship God according to his will, may offer the *sacrifices of righteousness* (Ps. iv. 5), the offering of prayer, and praise, and holy love, that they may be the *true worshippers, who worship the Father in spirit and in truth*, John iv. 23, 24. Note, We cannot offer unto the Lord any right performances in religion unless our persons be justified and sanctified. Till we ourselves be refined and purified by the grace of God, we cannot do any thing that will redound to

the glory of God. God had respect to Abel first, and then to his offering; and therefore God purges his people, that they may offer their offerings to him in righteousness, Zeph. iii. 9. He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good. And then it follows (v. 4), *The offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord.* It shall no longer be offensive, as it has been, when, in the former days, they worshipped other gods with the God of Israel, or when, in the present days, they brought the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice; but it shall be *acceptable*; he will be pleased with the offerers, and their offerings, *as in the days of old and as in former years*, as in the primitive times of the church, as when God had respect to Abel's sacrifice and smelled a savour of rest from Noah's, and when he kindled Aaron's sacrifice with fire from heaven. When the Messiah comes, *First*, He will, by his grace in them, make them acceptable; when he has purified and refined them, then they shall offer such sacrifices as God requires and will accept. *Secondly*, He will, by his intercession for them, make them accepted; he will recommend them and their performances to God, so that their prayers, being perfumed with the incense of his intercession, shall be pleasant unto the Lord; for he has *made us accepted in the Beloved*, and in him is well pleased with those that are in him (Matt. iii. 17) and bring forth fruit in him.

(2.) It shall turn for a testimony against those that are resolved to go on in their wickedness, v. 5. 'This is the direct answer to their challenge, "*Where is the God of judgment?*" You shall know where he is, and shall know it to your terror and confusion, for *I will come near to you to judgment*; to you that set divine justice at defiance." To them the gospel of Christ will be a *savour of death unto death*; it will bind them over to condemnation and will judge them in the great day, John xii. 48. Let us see here, [1.] Who the sinners are that must appear to be judged by the gospel of Christ. They are the *sorcerers*, who deal in spiritual wickedness, that forsake the oracles of the God of truth to consult the father of lies; and the *adulterers*, who wallow in the lusts of the flesh, those adulterers who were charged with *dealing treacherously* (ch. ii. 15); and the *false swearers*, who profane God's name and affront his justice, by calling him to witness to a lie; and the oppressors, who barbarously injure and trample upon those who lie at their mercy, and are not able to help themselves: they *defraud the hireling in his wages* and will not give him what he agreed for; they *crush the widow and fatherless*, and will not pay them their just debts, because they cannot prove them, or have not wherewithal to sue for them; the poor *stranger* too, who has no friend to stand by him and is ignorant of the laws of the coun-



try, they turn aside from his right, so that he cannot keep or cannot recover his own. That which is at the bottom of all this is, *They fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. The transgression of the wicked plainly declares that there is no fear of God before his eyes.* Where no fear of God is no good is to be expected. [2.] Who will appear against them: *I will come near*, says God, *and will be a swift witness against them.* They justify themselves, and, their sins having been artfully concealed, hope to escape punishment for want of proof; but God, who sees and knows all things, will himself be witness against them, and his omniscience is instead of a thousand witnesses, for to it the sinner's own conscience shall be made to subscribe, and so every mouth shall be stopped. He will be a swift witness; though they reflect upon him as slow and dilatory, and ask, *Where is the God of judgment*, and where the promise of his coming? they will find that *he is not slack* concerning his threatenings any more than he is concerning his promises. Judgment against those sinners shall not be put off for want of evidence, for he will be a swift witness. His judgment shall overtake them, and it shall be impossible for them to outrun it. *Evil pursues sinners.*

IV. The ratification of all this (v. 6): *For I am the Lord; I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.* Here we have, 1. God's immutability asserted by himself, and glorified in: *"I am the Lord; I change not; and therefore no word that I have spoken shall fall to the ground."* Is God a just revenger of those that rebel against him? Is he the bountiful rewarder of those that diligently seek him? In both these he is unchangeable. Though the sentence passed against evil works (v. 5) be not executed speedily, yet it will be executed, for he is the Lord; he changes not; he is as much an enemy to sin as ever he was, and impenitent sinners will find him so. There needs no *scire facias*—a writ calling one to show cause, to revive God's judgment, for it is never antiquated, or out of date, but against those that go on still in their trespasses the curse of his law still remains in full force, power, and virtue. 2. A particular proof of it, from the comfortable experience which the people of Israel had had of it. They had reason to say that he was an unchangeable God, for he had been faithful to his covenant with them and their fathers; if he had not adhered to that, they would have been consumed long ago and cut off from being a people; they had been false and fickle in their conduct to him, and he might justly have abandoned them, and then they would soon have been consumed and ruined; but because he remembered his covenant, and would not violate that, nor alter the thing that had gone forth out of his lips, they were preserved from ruin and recovered from the brink of it. It was purely because he would

be as good as his word, Deut. vii. 8; Lev. xxvi. 42. Now as God had kept them from ruin, while the covenant of peculiarity remained in force, purely because he would be faithful to that covenant, and would show that *he is not a man that he should lie* (Num. xxiii. 19), so, when that covenant should be superseded and set aside by the New Testament, and they, by rejecting the blessings of it, lay themselves open to the curses, he will show that in the determinations of his wrath, as well as in those of his mercy, *he is not a man, that he should repent*, but will then be as true to his threatenings as hitherto he had been to his promises; see 1 Sam. xv. 29. We may all apply this very sensibly to ourselves; because we have to do with a God that changes not, therefore it is that *we are not consumed*, even because his compassions fail not; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness, Lam. iii. 22, 23.

7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? 8 Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

We have here God's controversy with the men of that generation, for deserting his service and robbing him—wicked servants indeed, that not only run away from their Master, but run away with their Master's goods.

1. They had run away from their Master, and quitted the work he gave them to do (v. 7): *You have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them.* The ordinances of God's worship were the business which as servants they must mind, the talents which

they must trade with, and the trust which was committed to them to keep; but they went away from them, grew weary of them, and withdrew their neck from that yoke; they deviated from the rule that God had prescribed to them, and betrayed the trust lodged with them. They had revolted from God, not only in worship, but in conversation; they had not *kept his ordinances*. This disobedience they were chargeable with, and had been guilty of, even *from the days of their fathers*; either as in the days of their fathers of old, who were sent into captivity for their disobedience, or, "Now, for some generations past, you have fallen off from what you were, when first you came back out of captivity." Ezra owns it in one particular instance: *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day*, Ezra ix. 7. Now observe, 1. What a gracious invitation God gives them to return and repent: "*Return unto me*, and to your duty, return to your service, return to your allegiance, return as a traveller that has missed his way, as a soldier that has run his colours, as a treacherous wife that has gone away from her husband; return, thou backsliding Israel, return to me; and then *I will return unto you* and be reconciled, will remove the judgments you are under and prevent those you fear." This had been of old the burden of the song (Zech. i. 3), and is still. 2. What a peevish answer they return to this gracious invitation: "*But you said with disdain*, said it to the prophets that called you, said it to one another, said it to your own hearts, to stifle the convictions you were under; you said, *Wherein shall we return?*" Note, God takes notice what returns our hearts make to the calls of his word, what we say and what we think when we have heard a sermon, what answer we give to the message sent us. When God calls us to *return*, we should answer as those did Jer. iii. 22, *Behold, we come*. But not as these here, *Wherein shall we return?* (1.) They take it as an affront to be *told of their faults*, and called upon to amend them; they are ready to say, "What ado do these prophets make about returning and repenting; why are we disgraced and disturbed thus, our own consciences and our neighbours stirred up against us?" It is ill with those who thus count reproofs reproaches, and *kick against the pricks*. (2.) They are so ignorant of themselves, and of the strictness, extent, and spiritual nature, of the divine law, that they see nothing in themselves to be repented of, or reformed; they are pure in their own eyes, and think they need no repentance. (3.) They are so firmly resolved to go on in sin that they will find a thousand foolish frivolous excuses to shift off their repentance, and turn away the calls that are given them to repent. They seem to speak only as those that wanted something to say; it is a mere evasion, a banter upon the pro-

phet, and a challenge to him to descend to particulars. Note, Many ruin their own souls by baffling the calls that are given them to repent of their sins.

II. They had robbed their Master, and embezzled his goods. They had asked, "*Wherein shall we return?*" What have we done amiss?" And he soon tells them. Observe, 1. The prophet's high charge exhibited, in God's name, against the people. They stand indicted for robbery, for sacrilege, the worst of robberies: *You have robbed me*. He expostulates with them upon it: *Will a man* be so daringly impudent as to *rob God?* Man, who is a weak creature, and cannot contend with God's power, will he think to rob him *vi et armis—forcibly?* Man, who lies open to God's knowledge, and cannot conceal himself from that, will he think to rob him *clam et secreto—privily?* Man, who depends upon God, and derives his all from him, will he rob him that is his benefactor? This is ungrateful, unjust, and unkind, indeed; and it is very unwise thus to provoke him from whom our judgment proceeds. *Will a man do violence to God?* so some read it. *Will a man stint or straiten him?* so others read it. Robbing God is a heinous crime. 2. The people's high challenge in answer to that charge: *But you say, Wherein have we robbed thee?* They plead *Not guilty*, and put God upon the proof of it. Note, Robbing God is such a heinous crime that those who are guilty of it are not willing to own themselves guilty. They rob God, and know not what they do. They rob him of his honour, rob him of that which is devoted to him, to be employed in his service, rob him of themselves, rob him of sabbath-time, rob him of that which is given for the support of religion, and give him not his dues out of their estates; and yet they ask, *Wherein have we robbed thee?* 3. The plain proof of the charge, in answer to this challenge; it is in *tithes and offerings*. Out of these the priests and Levites had maintenance for themselves and their families; but they detained them, defrauded the priests of them, would not pay their tithes, or not in full, or not of the best; they brought not the offerings which God required, or brought the torn, and lame, and sick, which were not fit for use. They were all guilty of this sin, even *the whole nation*, as if they were in confederacy against God, and all combined to rob him of his dues and to stand by one another in it when they had done. For this they were *cursed with a curse*, v. 9. God punished them with famine and scarcity, through unseasonable weather, or insects that ate up the fruits of the earth. God had thus punished them for neglecting to build the temple (Hag. i. 10, 11), and now for not maintaining the temple-service. Note, Those that deny God his part of their estates may justly expect a curse upon their own part of them: "*You are cursed with a curse*"



for robbing me, and yet you go on to do it." Note, It is a great aggravation of sin when men persist in it notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence which they are under for it. Nay, it should seem, because God had punished them with scarcity of bread, they made that a pretence for robbing him—that now, being impoverished, they could not afford to bring their tithes and offerings, but must save them, that they might have bread for their families. Note, It argues great perverseness in sin when men make those afflictions excuses for sin which are sent to part between them and their sins. When they had but little they should have done the more good with that little, and that would have been the way to make it more; but it is ill with the patient when that which should cure the disease serves only to palliate it, and prevent its being searched into. 4. An earnest exhortation to reform in this matter, with a promise that if they did the judgments they were under should be quickly removed. (1.) Let them take care to do their duty (v. 10): *Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse.* They had brought some; but, like Ananias and Sapphira, had *kept back part of the price*, pretending they could not spare so much as was required, and *necessity has no law*; but even necessity must have this law, and it would redress the grievance of their necessity: "Bring in the full tithes to the utmost that the law requires, *that there may be meat in God's house* for those that serve at the altar, whether there be meat in your houses or no." Note, God must be served in the first place, and our quota must be contributed for the support of religion in the place where we live, that God's name may be sanctified, and his kingdom may come, and his will be done, even before we provide our daily bread; for the interests of our souls ought to be preferred before those of our bodies. (2.) Let them then trust God to provide for them and their comfort: "Let God be first served, and then *prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, whether I will not open the windows of heaven.*" They said, "Let God give us our plenty again, as formerly, and try us whether we will not then bring him his tithes and offerings, as we did formerly." "No," says God, "do you first bring in all your tithes as they become due, and all the arrears of what is past, and try me, whether I will not then restore you your plenty." Note, Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust; and we may all venture to do so, for, though many have been losers for him, never any were losers by him in the end. It is fit that we should venture first, for *his reward is with him*, but *his work is before him*; we must first do the work which is our part, and then try him and trust him for the reward. Elijah put the widow of Zarephath into this method when he said (1 Kings xvii. 13), "*Make me a little cake first*, and then prove me whether

there shall not be enough afterwards *for thee and thy son.*" That which discourages people from the expenses of charity is the weakness of their faith concerning the gains and advantages of charity; they cannot think that they shall get by it. But it is a reasonable demand that God here makes: "*Prove me now*; is any thing to be got by charity? *Come and see*; Nothing venture, nothing win. Trust upon honour, "And you shall find," [1.] "That, whereas the heavens have been shut up, and there has been no rain, now God will *open to you the windows of heaven*, for in his hand the key of the clouds is, and you shall have seasonable rain." Or the expression is figurative; every good gift coming from above, thence God will plentifully pour out upon them the bounties of his providence. Very sudden plenty is expressed by *opening the windows of heaven*, 2 Kings vii. 2. We find the *windows of heaven opened*, to pour down a deluge of wrath, in Noah's flood, Gen. vii. 11. But here they are opened to *pour down blessings*, to such a degree that there should not be *room enough to receive* them. So plentifully shall their ground bring forth that they shall be tempted to *pull down their barns and build greater*, for want of room, Luke xii. 18. Or, as Dr. Pocock explains it, "I will pour out on you such a blessing as shall be *not enough only*, and such as shall be sufficient, but *more and more than enough*;" that is, a great addition. The oil that is multiplied shall not be stayed as long as there are vessels to receive it, 2 Kings iv. 6. Note, God will not only be reconciled to sinners that repent and reform, but he will be a benefactor, a bountiful benefactor, to them. We are never straitened in him, but often straitened in our own bosoms. God has blessings ready to bestow upon us, but, through the weakness of our faith and narrowness of our desires, we have not room to receive them. [2.] That, whereas the fruits of their ground had been eaten up by locusts and caterpillars, God would now remove that judgment (v. 11): "*I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes*, and will check the progress of those destroying animals, that they shall no more destroy the products of the earth and the fruits of the trees." God has all creatures at his beck, can command them and remand them at his pleasure. *Neither shall the vine cast her fruit before the time*; it shall not be blasted or blown off. Or, as some read it, *Neither shall the devourer make your vine barren*, as the locusts did, Joel i. 7. [3.] That, whereas their neighbours had upbraided them with their scarcity, and they had lain under the *reproach of famine*, which was the more grievous because their country used to be boasted of for its plenty, now *all nations shall call them blessed*, shall speak honourably of them, and own them to be a happy people. [4.] That whereas their sin had made their land displeasing to God (even their

temple, and altars, and offerings were so, *ch.* ii. 13), and whereas his judgments had made their land unpleasant to them, and very melancholy, "*Now you shall be a delightful land, your country shall be acceptable to God and comfortable to yourselves.*" Note, The reviving of religion in a land will make it indeed a delightful land both to God and to all good people; he will say, *It is my rest for ever; here will I dwell*; and they will say the same, Isa. lxii. 4; Deut. xi. 12. It should seem that this charge to bring in the tithes had its good effect, for we find (Neh. xiii. 12) that *all Judah did bring in their tithe into the treasures*, and, no doubt, they had the benefit of these promises, in the return of their plenty, immediately upon their return to their duty, that they might plainly discern for what cause the evil had been upon them (for when the cause was removed the evil was removed), and that they might see how perfectly reconciled God was to them upon their repentance, and how their transgression was remembered no more, for the curse was not only taken away, but turned into an abundant blessing.

13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken *so much* against thee? 14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? 15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, *they that tempt God* are even delivered. 16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. 18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

Among the people of the Jews at this time, though they all enjoyed the same privileges and advantages, there were men of very different characters (as ever were, and ever will be, in the world and in the church), like Jeremiah's figs, some very good and others very bad, some that plainly appeared to be

the children of God and others that as plainly discovered themselves to be the children of the wicked one. There are tares and wheat in the same field, chaff and corn in the same floor; and here we have an account of both.

I. Here is the angry notice God takes of the impudent blasphemous talk of the sinners in Zion and his just resentments of it. Probably there was a club of them that were in league against religion, that set up for wits, and set their wits on work to run it down and ridicule it, and herein strengthened one another's hands. Here is,

1. An indictment found against them, for treasonable words spoken against the King of kings: *Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord.* They spoke against God, in reflection upon him, in contradiction to him, as their fathers *in the wilderness* (Ps. lxx. 19); *yea, they spoke against God.* What he said, and what he designed, they opposed, as if they had been retained of counsel against him and his cause. Their words against God were *stout*; they came from their pride, and haughtiness, and contempt of God. What they said against God they spoke loudly, as if they cared not who heard them; they were not themselves ashamed to say it, and they desired to propagate their atheistical notions and to infect the minds of others with them. They spoke it boldly, as those that were resolved to stand to it, and were in no fear of being called to an account. They spoke it proudly, and with insolence and disdain, scorning to be under the divine check and government. *They strengthened themselves*; they would be valiant against the Almighty, Job xv. 25.

2. Their plea to this indictment. They said, *What have we spoken so much against thee?* They deny the words, and put the prophet to prove them; or, if they spoke the words, they did not design them against God, and therefore will not own there was any harm in them; at least they extenuate the matter: *What have we spoken so much against thee*, so much that there needs all this ado about it? They cannot deny that they have spoken against God, but they make a light matter of it, and wonder it should be taken notice of: "*Words*" (say they) "*are but wind*"; others have said more and done worse; if we are not so good as we should be, yet we hope we are not so bad as we are represented to be." Note, It is common for sinners that are unconvinced and unhumiliated to deny or extenuate the faults they are justly charged with, and to insist upon their own justification, against the reproofs of the word and of their own consciences. But it will be to no purpose.

3. The words themselves which they are charged with. God keeps an account of what men say, as well as of what they do, and will let them know that he does so. We quickly forget what we have said, and are ready to deny what we have said amiss; but



God can say, *You have said so and so.* They had said it as their deliberate judgment.

(1.) That there is nothing to be got in the service of God, though it is a service that subjects men to labour and sorrow. They said, *It is vain to serve God*, or, "*He is vain that serves God*, that is, he labours in vain and to no purpose; he has his labour for his pains, and therefore is a fool for his labour.

*What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, or his observation, that we have observed what he has appointed us to observe?"*

*What mammon, or wealth, have we gained,* says Dr. Po-cock that it was for mammon's sake only that they served God, and so indeed not God at all, but mammon. "We have walked mournfully, or in black, with great gravity and great grief, before the Lord of hosts, have afflicted our souls at the times appointed for that purpose, and yet we are never the better." Perhaps this comes in as a reason why they would not trust God to prosper them upon their bringing in the tithes (v. 10);

"For," say they, "we have tried him in other things, and have lost by him." This is a very unjust and unreasonable reflection upon the service of God, and we can call witnesses enough to confront the slander. [1.] They would have it thought that they had served God and had kept his ordinances, whereas it was only the external observance of them that they had kept up, while they were perfect strangers to the inward part of the duty, and therefore might say, *It is in vain.* God says so (Matt. xv. 9), *In vain do those worship me whose hearts are far from me while they draw near with their mouth;* but whose fault is that? Not God's, who is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently, but theirs who seek him carelessly. [2.]

They insisted much upon it that they had walked mournfully before God, whereas God had required them to serve him with gladness, and to walk cheerfully before him. They by their own superstitions made the service of God a task and drudgery to themselves, and then complained of it as a hard service. The yoke of Christ is easy; it is the yoke of antichrist that is heavy. [3.]

They complained that they had got nothing by their religion; they were still in poverty and affliction, and behindhand in the world. This is an old piece of impiety. Job xxi. 14, 15, *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* Elihu charges Job with saying something like this. Job xxiv. 9, *It profits a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.* The enemies of religion do but set up against it the old cavils that have been long since answered and exploded. Perhaps this refers to the errors of the sect of the Sadducees, which was the scandal of the Jewish church in its latter days; they denied a future state, and then said, *It is vain to serve God*, which has indeed some colour in

it, for, *if in this life only we had hope in Christ, we were of all men most miserable*, 1 Cor. xv. 19. Note, Those do a great deal of wrong to God's honour who say that religion is either an unprofitable or an unpleasant thing; for the matter is not so: wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and wisdom's gains better than that of fine gold.

(2.) They maintained that wickedness was the way to prosperity, for they had observed that the workers of wickedness were set up in the world, and those that tempted God were delivered, v. 15. The outward prosperity of sinners in their sins, as it has weakened the hands of the godly in their godliness (Ps. lxxiii. 13), so it has strengthened the hands of the wicked in their wickedness. Note, [1.] Those that work wickedness tempt God by presumptuous sins; they do, as it were, try God, whether he can and will punish them as he has said in his word, and, in effect, challenge him to do his worst, by provoking him in the highest degree. [2.] Those that tempt God by their wicked works are many times both delivered out of the adversity into which they were justly brought and advanced to the prosperity which they were utterly unworthy of. They are not only set up once, but when we thought their day had come to fall, and they were in trouble, they were delivered and set up again; so strangely did Providence seem to smile upon them. [3.]

Though it be thus, yet it will not warrant us to call the proud happy. For they may be delivered and set up for a while, but it will appear that God resists them, and that their pride is a preface to their fall; and, if so, they are truly miserable, and it is folly to call them happy, and to bless those whom the Lord abhors. Wait awhile, and you shall see those that work wickedness set up as a mark to the arrows of God's vengeance, and those that tempt God delivered to the tormentors. Judge of things as they will appear shortly, when the doom of these proud sinners (which follows here, ch. iv. 1) comes to be executed to the utmost.

II. Here is the gracious notice God takes of the pious talk of the saints in Zion, and the gracious recompence of it. Even in this corrupt and degenerate age, when there was so great a decay, nay, so great a contempt, of serious godliness, there were yet some that retained their integrity and zeal for God; and let us see,

1. How they distinguished themselves, and what their character was; it was the reverse of theirs that spoke so much against God; for, (1.) They feared the Lord—that is the beginning of wisdom and the root of all religion; they revered the majesty of God, submitted to his authority, and had a dread of his wrath in all they thought and said; they humbly complied with God, and never spoke any stout words against him. In every age there has been a remnant that feared the Lord, though sometimes but a

little remnant. (2.) They *thought upon his name*; they seriously considered and frequently meditated upon the discoveries God has made of himself in his word and by his providences, and their *meditation of him* was *sweet* to them and influenced them. They *thought on his name*; they consulted the honour of God and aimed at that as their ultimate end in all they did. Note, Those that know the name of God should often think of it and dwell upon it in their thoughts; it is a copious curious subject, and frequent thoughts of it will contribute very much to our communion with God and the stirring up of our devout affections to him. (3.) They *spoke often one to another* concerning the God they feared, and that name of his which they thought so much of; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and a good man, out of a *good treasure* there, will *bring forth good things*. Those that feared the Lord kept together as those that were company for each other; they spoke kindly and endearingly one to another, for the preserving and promoting of mutual love, that that might not *wax cold* when *iniquity* did thus *abound*. They spoke intelligently and edifyingly to one another, for the increasing and improving of faith and holiness; they *spoke one to another* in the language of those that fear the Lord and think on his name—the language of Canaan. When profaneness had come to so great a height as to trample upon all that is sacred, then those that feared the Lord *spoke often one to another*. [1.] Then, when iniquity was bold and barefaced, the people of God took courage, and stirred up themselves, *the innocent against the hypocrite*, Job xvii. 8. The worse others are the better we should be; when vice is daring, let not virtue be sneaking. [2.] Then, when religion was reproached and misrepresented, its friends did all they could to support the credit of it and to keep it in countenance. It had been suggested that the ways of God are melancholy unpleasant ways, solitary and sorrowful; and therefore then those that feared God studied to evince the contrary by their cheerfulness in mutual love and converse, that they might *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*. [3.] Then, when seducers were busy to deceive and to possess unwary souls with prejudices against religion, those that feared God were industrious to arm themselves and one another against the contagion by mutual instructions, excitements, and encouragements, and to strengthen one another's hands. As evil communication corrupts good minds and manners, so good communication confirms them.

2. How God dignified them, and what further honour and favour he intended for them. Those who spoke stoutly against God, no doubt looked with disdain and displeasure upon those that feared him, hectoring and bantering them; but they had little reason

to regard that, or be disturbed at it, when God countenanced them.

(1.) He took notice of their pious discourses, and was graciously present at their conferences: *The Lord hearkened and heard it*, and was well pleased with it. God says (Jer. viii. 6) that he *hearkened and heard* what bad men would say, and they *spoke not aright*; here he hearkened and heard what good men did say, for they spoke aright. Note, The gracious God observes all the gracious words that proceed out of the mouths of his people; they need not desire that men may hear them, and commend them; let them not seek praise from men by them, nor affect to be taken notice of by them; but let it satisfy them that, be the conference ever so private, God sees and hears in secret and will *reward openly*. When the two disciples, going to Emmaus, were discoursing concerning Christ, he hearkened and heard, and joined himself to them, and made a third, Luke xxiv. 15.

(2.) He kept an account of them: *A book of remembrance was written before him*. Not that the Eternal Mind needs to be reminded of things by books and writings, but it is an expression after the manner of men, intimating that their pious affections and performances are kept in remembrance as punctually and particularly as if they were written in a book, as if journals were kept of all their conferences. Great kings had books of remembrance written, and read before them, in which were entered all the services done them, when, and by whom, as Esther ii. 23. God, in like manner, remembers the services of his people, that, in the review of them, he may say, *Well done; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. God has a book for the sighs and tears of his mourners (Ps. lvi. 8), much more for the pleadings of his advocates. Never was any good word spoken of God, or for God, from an honest heart, but it was registered, that it might be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, and in no wise lose its reward.

(3.) He promises them a share in his glory hereafter (v. 17): *They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels*. When God utterly cuts off the Jewish church and nation for their infidelity, the remnant among them, that believed his word, and, having waited for the consolation of Israel, welcome him when he comes, shall be admitted into the Christian church, and shall become a peculiar people to God; God will take care of them, that they *perish not with those that believe not*; but that they be *hidden in the day of the Lord's anger* against that nation. *They shall be my segullah—my peculiar treasure* (it is the word used, Exod. xix. 5), *in the day when I make or do what I have said and designed to do*; so some read it. These pious ones shall have all the glorious privileges of God's Israel appropriated to them and centering in



them; they shall now be his peculiar treasure, when the rest are rejected; they shall now be the vessels of mercy and honour, when the rest are made vessels of wrath and dishonour, vessels in which is no pleasure. This may be applied to all the faithful people of God, and the distinction he will put between them and others in the great day.

Note, [1.] The saints are God's jewels; they are highly esteemed by him and are dear to him; they are comely with the comeliness that he puts upon them, and he is pleased to glory in them; they are a *royal diadem* in his hand, Isa. lxii. 3. He looks upon them as his own proper goods, his choice goods, his treasure, laid up in his cabinet, and the furniture of his closet, Ps. cxxxv. 4. The rest of the world is but lumber, in comparison with them. [2.] There is a day coming when God will *make up his jewels*. They shall be gathered up out of the dirt into which they are now thrown, and gathered together from all places to which they are now scattered; he shall *send forth his angels to gather his elect*, who are his jewels, *from the four winds of heaven* (Matt. xxiv. 31), to gather his jewels into his jewel-house, as the wheat from several fields into the barn. All the saints will then be gathered to Christ, and none but saints, and saints made perfect; then God's jewels will be made up, as stones into a crown, as stars into a constellation. [3.] Those who now own God for theirs, he will then own for his, will publicly confess them before angels and men: "*They shall be mine*; their sanctification shall be completed, and so they shall be perfectly and entirely mine, without any remaining interests of the world and the flesh." Their relation to God shall be acknowledged, and his property in them. He will separate them from those that are not his, and give them their portion with those that are his; for to them it shall be said, *Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*. They were in doubt, sometimes, whether they were belonging to God or no; but the matter shall then be put out of doubt. God himself will say unto them, *You are mine*. Now their relation to God is what they are reproached with, but it will then be gloried in; God himself will glory in it.

(4.) He promises them a share in his grace now: *I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him*. God had promised to own them as his and take them to be with him; but it might be a discouragement to them to think that they had offended God, and that he might justly disown them, and cast them off; but, as to that, he says, "*I will spare them*; I will not deal with them as they deserve. *I will rejoice over them*" (so some expound it) "as the bridegroom over his bride," Isa. lxii. 5; Zeph. iii. 17. But the word usually signifies to spare with commiseration and compassion, as a father pities his children, Ps. ciii. 13.

Note, [1.] It is our duty to serve God with the disposition of children. We must be his sons, must by a new birth partake of a divine nature, must consent to the covenant of adoption and partake of the spirit of adoption. And we must be his servants; God will not have his children trained up in idleness; they must do him service, and they must do it from a principle of love, with cheerfulness and delight, and as those that are therein serving their own true interest, and this is serving as *a son with the father*, Phil. ii. 22. [2.] If we serve God with the disposition of children, he will spare us with the tenderness and compassion of a Father. Even God's children that serve him stand in need of sparing mercy, that mercy to which we owe it that we are not consumed, that mercy which keeps us out of hell. Nehemiah, when he had done much good, yet, knowing there is not a *just man on earth*, that *does good and sins not*, and that every sin deserves God's wrath, prays, *Lord, spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy*; see Neh. xiii. 22. And God, as a Father, will show them this mercy. He will not be extreme to mark what we do amiss, but will make the best of us and our poor performances; he will mitigate the afflictions his children are exercised with, and save them from the ruin they deserve. The father continues to spare the son, and does it with complacency, because he is his own; thus God will spare humble penitents and petitioners, as *a man spares his son that serves him*, though we do him so little service, nay, though we do him so much disservice.

3. How they will thus be distinguished from the children of this world (v. 18): "*Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked*, between sinners and saints, between those that *serve God* and make conscience of their duty to him and those that *serve him not*, but put contempt upon his service. You that now speak against God as making no difference between good and bad, and therefore say, *It is in vain to serve him* (v. 14), you shall be made to see your error; you that would speak for God, but know not what to say as to this, that there seems to be *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, and *all things come alike to all*, will then have the matter set in a true light, and will see, to your everlasting satisfaction, the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Then *you shall return*, that is, you shall *change your mind*, and come to a right understanding of the thing." This primarily respects the manifest difference that was made by the divine Providence between the believing Jews and those that persisted in their infidelity, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish church and nation, by the Romans. But it is to have its full accomplishment at the second coming of Jesus Christ, and on that great discriminating day when it shall be

easy enough to discern between the righteous and the wicked. Note, (1.) All the children of men are either righteous or wicked, either such as serve God or such as serve him not. This is that division of the children of men which will last for ever, and by which their eternal state will be determined; all are going either to heaven or to hell. (2.) In this world it is often hard to discern between the righteous and the wicked. They are mingled together, good fish and bad in the same net. The righteous are so distempered, and the wicked so disguised, that we are often deceived in our opinions concerning both the one and the other. There are many who, we think, serve God, who, having not their hearts right with him, will be found none of his servants; and, on the other hand, many will be found his faithful servants, who, because they followed not with us, did not, as we thought, serve him. But that which especially raised the difficulty here was that the divine Providence seemed to make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; you could not know wicked men by God's frowning upon them, for they commonly prospered in the world, nor righteous men by his smiling upon them, for they were involved with others in the same common calamity. None now knows God's love or hatred by all that is before him, Eccl. ix. 1. (3.) At the bar of Christ, in the last judgment, it will be easy to discern between the righteous and the wicked; for then every man's character will be both perfected and perfectly discovered, every man will then appear in his true colours, and his disguises will be taken off. Some men's sins indeed go beforehand, and you may now tell who is wicked, but others follow after; however, in the great day, we shall see who was righteous and who wicked. Every man's condition likewise will be both perfected and everlastingly determined; the righteous will then be perfectly happy and the wicked perfectly miserable, without mixture or alloy. When the righteous are all set on the right hand of Christ, and invited to come for a blessing, and all the wicked on his left hand, and are told to depart with a curse, then it will be easy to discern between them. As to ourselves, therefore, we are concerned to think among which we shall have our lot, and, as to others, we must judge nothing before the time.

## CHAP. IV.

We have here proper instructions given us (very proper to close the canon of the Old Testament with), I. Concerning the state of recompence and retribution that is before us, the misery of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous in that state, ver. 1-3. And this is represented to us under a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unbelieving Jews with it, and of the comforts and triumphs of those among them that received the gospel. II. Concerning the state of trial and preparation we are now in, to which we are directed to have an eye to divine revelation, and to follow that; they then must keep to the law of Moses (ver. 4) and expect a further discovery of God's will by Elijah the prophet; that is, by John Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah, ver. 5, 6. The last chapter of the New Testament is much to the same purport, setting before us heaven and hell in the other world, and obliging us to adhere to the word of God in this world.

**F**OR, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

The great and terrible day of the Lord is here prophesied of. This, like the pillar of cloud and fire, shall have a dark side turned towards the Egyptians that fight against God, and a bright side towards the faithful Israelites that follow him: *The day cometh*, that is, the Lord cometh, the day of the Lord; and it has reference both to the first and to the second coming of Jesus Christ; the day of both was fixed, and should answer the character here given of it.

I. In both Christ is a consuming fire to those that rebel against him. The day of his coming shall burn as an oven; it shall be a day of wrath, of fiery indignation. This was foretold concerning the Messiah, Ps. xxi. 9, *Thy hand shall find out all thy enemies, and shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of thy anger.* It will be a day of terror and destruction like the burning of a city, or rather of a wood, the trees whereof are withered and dried, for to that the allusion seems to be, as Isa. x. 17, 18, *The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field.* Now observe here, 1. Who shall be fuel to this fire—all the proud in heart, whose words have been stout against God, and their necks stiff and unapt to yield to the yoke of his commandments (all those that in the pride of their countenances will not seek after God, nor submit to the grace and government of Jesus Christ—all that proudly say they will not have Christ to reign over them), and all those that do wickedly in their affections and conversations, that wilfully persist in sin, in contempt of and contradiction to the law of God; they are such as do wickedly against the covenant, as another prophet had lately expressed it, Dan. xi. 32. God, that has perfect knowledge of every one's character, knows who are the proud, and of every one's actions, knows who they are that do wickedly; and they shall be as stubble to this fire; they shall be consumed by it, easily consumed. utterly consumed, and it is wholly



owing to themselves that they shall be so, for they make themselves stubble, that is, combustible matter, to this fire. If they were not stubble, it would not burn them; for the fire will be to every man according as he and his works are found; if they be *wood, hay, and stubble*, they will be *consumed*; but if they be *gold, silver, and precious stones*, they will *abide the fire* and be purified by it, 1 Cor. iii. 13—15. Those that by their unbelief oppose Christ thereby set themselves as *briers and thorns* before a *devouring fire*, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. 2. What shall be the force and what the fruit of this fire: *The day that cometh shall burn them up*, shall both terrify and ruin them, and shall *leave them neither root nor branch*, neither *son nor nephew* (so the Chaldee paraphrase): neither they nor their posterity shall be spared; they shall be wholly extirpated and cut off. *Who knows the power of God's anger?* *The proud and those that do wickedly* will not fear it, but they shall be made to feel it. Where are those now that *called the proud happy*, when thus they are made completely miserable, when there remains no branch of their happiness to be enjoyed for the present, nor any root of it out of which it might again spring up? Now this was fulfilled, (1.) When Christ, in his doctrine, spoke terror and condemnation to the proud Pharisees and the other Jews that did wickedly, when he sent that fire on the earth which burnt up the chaff of the traditions of the elders and the corrupt glosses they had put upon the law of God. (2.) When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the nation of the Jews, as a nation, quite blotted out from under heaven, and neither root nor branch left them. This seems to be principally intended here; our Saviour says that those should be the *days of vengeance*, when all the things that were written to that purport should be fulfilled, Luke xxi. 22. Then the unbelieving Jews were as stubble to the devouring fire of God's judgments, which gathered together to them as the eagles to the carcase. (3.) It is certainly applicable, and is to be applied, to the day of judgment, to the particular judgment at death (some of the Jewish doctors refer it the *punishment that seizes on the souls of the wicked immediately after they go out of the body*), but especially to the general judgment, at the end of time, when Christ shall be *revealed in flaming fire*, to execute judgment on the *proud, and all that do wickedly*. The whole world shall then *burn as an oven*, and all the children of this world, that set their hearts upon it and choose their portion in it, shall take their ruin with it, and the fire then kindled shall never be quenched.

II. In both Christ is a rejoicing light to those who serve him faithfully, to those who fear his name and give him the glory due to it (v. 2), who stand in awe of that name of his which the wicked profane and trample upon.

Here are mercy and comfort kept in store for all those who fear the Lord and think on his name. Observe,

1. Whence this mercy and comfort shall flow to them: *To you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings*. The day that comes, as it will be a stormy day to the wicked, a day in which God will rain upon them *fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest*, as he did on Sodom (Ps. xi. 6), a *day of clouds and thick darkness* (Amos v. 18, 20), so it will be a fair and bright day to those who fear God, and reviving as the rising sun is to the earth; and particular notice is taken of the rising of the sun upon Zoar when that was mercifully distinguished from the cities of the plain, which the fire *consumed*; see Gen. xix. 23. So to those that fear God is comfort spoken. When the hearts of others *fail for fear* let them *lift up their heads for joy*, for *their redemption draws nigh*, Luke xxi. 28. But by the *Sun of righteousness* here we are certainly to understand Jesus Christ, who would undertake to secure the believing remnant, in the day of the general destruction of the Jews, from falling with the rest, and to comfort them in that day of distress and perplexity with his consolations; he directed those that were in Judea to *flee to the mountains* (Matt. xxiv. 16), and they did so, and were all safe and easy in Pella. But it is to be applied more generally, (1.) To the coming of Christ in the flesh to seek and save those that were lost; then the *Sun of righteousness* arose upon this dark world. Christ is the *light of the world*, the true light, the great light that makes day and rules the day (John viii. 12), as the sun. He is the *light of men* (John i. 4), is to men's souls as the sun is to the visible world, which without the sun would be a dungeon; so would mankind be darkness itself without the *light of the glory of God shining in the face of Christ*. Christ is the Sun that has light in himself, and is the fountain of light (Ps. xix. 4—6); he is the *Sun of righteousness*, for he is himself a righteous Saviour. Righteousness is both the light and the heat of this Sun; the word of his righteousness is so; it guides, instructs, and quickens; so is the *everlasting righteousness* he has brought in. He is *made of God to us righteousness*; he is the *Lord our righteousness*, and therefore is fitly called the *Sun of righteousness*. Through him we are justified and sanctified, and so are brought to see light. This Sun of righteousness, in the fulness of time, arose upon the world, and with him *light came into the world* (John iii. 19), a *great light*, Matt. iv. 16. In him the *day-spring from on high visited us, to give light to those that sit in darkness*, Luke i. 78, 79. Righteousness sometimes signifies mercy or benignity, and it was in Christ that the *tender mercy of our God visited us*. (2.) It is applicable to the

graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, brought into the souls of men. Grotius understands it of Christ's giving the Spirit to those that are his, to shine in their hearts, and to be a *comforter* to them, a *sun* and a *shield*. Those that are possessed and governed by a holy fear of God and a dread of his majesty shall have his *love* also *shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*; and then the sun may be said to arise there, and to bring both a delightful day and a fruitful spring along with it. (3.) Christ's second coming will be a glorious and welcome sun-rising to all that *fear his name*; it will be that morning of the resurrection in which *the upright shall have dominion*, Ps. xlix. 14. That day which to the wicked will *burn as an oven* will to the righteous be bright as the morning; and it is what they wait for, *more than those that wait for the morning*.

2. What this mercy and comfort shall bring to them: He *shall arise with healing under his wings*, or in his rays or beams, which are as the wings of the sun. Christ came, as *the sun*, to bring not only light to a dark world, but health to a diseased dis-tempered world. The Jews (says Dr. Pocock) have a proverbial saying, *As the sun riseth, infirmities decrease*; the flowers which drooped and languished all night revive in the morning. Christ came into the world to be the great physician, yea, and the great medicine too, both the balm in Gilead and the physician there. When he was upon earth, he went about as the sun in his circuit, doing this good; he *healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people*; he healed by wholesale, as the sun does. He shall arise *with healing in his skirts*; so some read it, and they apply it to the story of the woman's touching *the hem of his garment*, and being thereby *made whole*, and his finding that *virtue went out of him*, Mark v. 28—30. But his healing bodily diseases was a specimen of his great design in coming into the world to heal the diseases of men's souls, and to put them into a good state of health, that they may serve and enjoy both God and themselves.

3. What good effect it shall have upon them. (1.) It shall make them vigorous in themselves: "*You shall go forth*, as those that are healed go abroad and return to their business." The souls shall go forth out of their bodies at death, and the bodies out of their graves at the resurrection, as prisoners out of their dungeons, and both to see the light and be set at liberty. "*You shall go forth* as plants out of the earth, when in the spring the sun returns." Some make it to mean the going forth of the Christians from Jerusalem, and the escape they thereby made from its destruction. And thus the souls on whom the Sun of righteousness arises *go forth out of the world, go forth out of Babylon*, as those that are made *free indeed*.

"You shall likewise *grow up*; being restored to health and liberty, you shall increase in knowledge, and grace, and spiritual strength." The souls on which the Sun of righteousness arises are growing up towards *the perfect man*; those that by the grace of God are made wise and good are by the same grace made wiser and better; and their path, like that of the rising sun, *shines more and more to the perfect day*, Prov. iv.

18. Their growth is compared to that of *the calves of the stall*, which is a quick, strong, and useful growth. "*You shall grow up*, not as the *flower of the field*, which is slender, and weak, and of little use, and withers soon after it has grown up, but as the *calves of the stall*," that, as one of the rabbin expounds it, *grow great in flesh and fatness*, with which both God's altars and men's tables are replenished; so the growth of the saints, on whom the Sun of righteousness arises, honours both God and man. Some read it, instead of *You shall grow up*, *You shall move yourselves, or leap for joy*, shall be as frolicsome as calves of the stall, when they are let loose in the open field; it denotes the joy of the saints, who rejoice in Christ Jesus; they shall even leap for joy; they are *always caused to triumph*.

(2.) It shall make them victorious over their enemies (v. 3): *You shall tread down the wicked*. Time was when the wicked trod them down, said to their souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*; but the day will come when they shall *tread down the wicked*. The wicked, being made Christ's footstool, are made theirs also (Ps. cx. 1), and come and worship before the feet of the church, Rev. iii. 9. *The elder shall serve the younger*. When believers by faith overcome the world, when they suppress their own corrupt appetites and passions, when the God of peace bruises Satan under their feet, then they *tread down the wicked*. When it came to the turn of the Christians to triumph over the Jews that had insulted over them, then this promise was fulfilled: *They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet*; they shall not only be trodden down, but trodden to dirt. When the day that comes shall have burnt them up, they shall trample upon them as ashes. When the righteous shall rise to *everlasting life*, the wicked shall rise to *everlasting contempt*; and, though they shall not triumph over them, they shall triumph in that God whose justice is glorified in their destruction. The saints in glory are said to have power given them over the nations, *to rule them with a rod of iron*, Rev. ii. 26, 27. *This you shall do, in the day that I shall do this*. Note, The saints' triumphs are all owing to God's victories; it is not they that do this, but God that does it for them, that says, *Come set your feet on the necks of these kings*. Some read it, "*In the day that I make, or shall make, the great day that I shall make remarkable, of which you will say with joy, This is the day which*



*the Lord has made.*" The day of the destruction of Jerusalem is called the *great and notable day of the Lord* (Acts ii. 20), and our Saviour in foretelling that destruction made use of such expressions as, like these, might be applied likewise to the *end of the world* and the *last judgment*; for it was such a terrible revelation of the wrath of God from heaven, and caused such a scene of horror upon this earth, that it might fitly serve for a type of that glorious transaction which will be an outlet to the days of time and an inlet to the days of eternity. By the accomplishment of these prophecies in the ruin of the Jewish nation, we should have our faith confirmed in the assurances Christ has given us concerning the dissolution of all things. *Surely I come quickly*; so says Christ, *the Lord of hosts*, to whom all power in heaven and earth is committed.

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with the statutes and judgments.* 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This is doubtless intended for a solemn conclusion, not only of this prophecy, but of the canon of the Old Testament, and is a plain information that they were not to expect any more sayings nor writings by divine inspiration, any more of the dictates of the Spirit of prophecy, till the beginning of the gospel of the Messiah, which sets aside the Apocrypha as no part of holy writ, and which therefore the Jews never received.

Now that prophecy ceases, and is about to be sealed up, there are two things required of the people of God, that lived then:—

1. They must keep up an obedient veneration for the law of Moses (v. 4): *Remember the law of Moses my servant*, and observe to do according to it, even that law which *I commanded unto him in Horeb*, that fiery law which was intended *for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments*, not only the law of the ten commandments, but all the other appointments, ceremonial and judicial, then and there given. Observe here, 1. The honourable mention that is made of *Moses*, the first writer of the Old Testament, in *Malachi*, the last writer. God by him calls him *Moses my servant*; for the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. See how the penmen of scripture, though they lived in several ages at a great distance from each other (it was above 1200 years from Moses to Malachi), all concurred in the same thing,

and supported one another, being all actuated and guided by one and the same Spirit. 2. The honourable mention that is made of the *law of Moses*; it was what God himself commanded; he owns it for his law, and he commanded it *for all Israel*, as the municipal law of their kingdom. Thus will God *magnify his law and make it honourable*. Note, We are concerned to keep the law because God has commanded it and commanded it for us, for we are the spiritual Israel; and, if we expect the benefit of the covenant with Israel (Heb. viii. 10), we must observe the commands given to Israel, those of them that were intended to be of perpetual obligation. 3. The summary of our duty, with reference to the law. We must remember it. Forgetfulness of the law is at the bottom of all our transgressions of it; if we would rightly remember it, we could not but conform to it. We should remember it when we have occasion to use it, remember both the commands themselves and the sanctions wherewith they are enforced. The office of conscience is to bid us *remember the law*. But how does this charge to remember the law of Moses come in here? (1.) This prophet had reproved them for many gross corruptions and irregularities both in worship and conversation, and now, for the reforming and amending of what was amiss, he only charges them to *remember the law of Moses*: "Keep to that rule, and you will do all you should do." He will *lay upon them no other burden* than what they *have received*; hold *that fast*, Rev. ii. 24, 25. Note, Corrupt churches are to be reformed by the written word, and reduced into order by being reduced to the standard of *the law and the testimony*, see 1 Cor. xi. 23. (2.) The church had long enjoyed the benefit of prophets, extraordinary messengers from God, and now they had a whole book of their prophecies put together, and it was a finished piece; but they must not think that hereby the *law of Moses* was superseded, and had become as an almanac out of date, as if now they were advanced to a higher form and might forget that. No; the prophets do but confirm and apply the law, and press the observance of that; and therefore still *Remember the law*. Note, Even when we have made considerable advances in knowledge we must still retain the first principles of practical religion and resolve to abide by them. Those that study the writings of the prophets, and the apocalypse, must still remember the law of Moses and the four gospels. (3.) Prophecy was now to cease in the church for some ages, and the Spirit of prophecy not to return till the *beginning of the gospel*, and now they are told to *remember the law of Moses*; let them live by the rules of that, and live upon the promises of that. Note, We need not complain for want of visions and revelations as long as we have the written word, and the canon of scripture complete,

to be our guide; for that is the most *sure word of prophecy*, and the touchstone by which we are to *try the spirits*. Though we have not prophets, yet, as long as we have Bibles, we may keep our communion with God, and keep ourselves in his way. (4.) They were to expect the coming of the Messiah, the preaching of his gospel, and the setting up of his kingdom, and in that expectation they must *remember the law of Moses*, and live in obedience to that, and then they might expect the comforts that the Messiah would bring to *the willing and obedient*. Let them observe the law of Moses, and live up to the light which that gave them, and then they might expect the benefit of the gospel of Christ, for *to him that has*, and uses what he has well, *more shall be given, and he shall have abundance*.

II. They must keep up a believing expectation of the gospel of Christ, and must look for the beginning of it in the appearing of Elijah the prophet (v. 5, 6): *Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet*. Though the Spirit of prophecy cease for a time, and you will have only the law to consult, yet it shall revive again in one that shall be sent *in the spirit and power of Elias*," Luke i. 17. *The law and the prophets were until John* (Luke xvi. 16); they continued to be the only lights of the church till that morning-star appeared. Note, As God never *left himself without witness* in the world, so neither in the church, but, as there was occasion, carried the light of divine revelation further and further to the perfect day. They had now Moses and the prophets, and might hear them; but God will go further: he will send them Elijah. Observe,

1. Who this prophet is that shall be sent; it is *Elijah*. The Jewish doctors will have it to be the same Elijah that prophesied in Israel in the days of Ahab—that he shall come again to be the forerunner of the Messiah; yet others of them say not the same person, but another of the same spirit. It should seem, those different sentiments they had when they asked John, "*Art thou Elias, or that prophet that should bear his name?*" John i. 19—21. But we Christians know very well that John Baptist was the Elias that was to come, Matt. xvii. 10—13; and very expressly, Matt. xi. 14, *This is Elias that was to come*; and v. 10, the same of whom it is written, *Behold, I send my messenger, ch. iii. 1*. Elijah was a man of great austerity and mortification, zealous for God, bold in reproofing sin, and active to reduce an apostate people to God and their duty; John Baptist was animated by the same spirit and power, and preached repentance and reformation, as Elias had done; and all held him for a prophet, as they did Elijah in his day, and that his baptism was *from heaven*, and not of men. Note, When God has such work to do as was formerly to be done he can raise up such men to do it as he formerly

raised up, and can put into a John Baptist the spirit of an Elias.

2. When he shall be sent—before the appearing of the Messiah, which, because it was the judgment of this world, and introduced the ruin of the Jewish church and nation, is here called *the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*. John Baptist gave them fair warning of this when he told them of the *wrath to come* (that *wrath to the uttermost* which was hastening upon them) and put them into a way of escape from it, and when he told them of the *scn in Christ's hand*, with which Christ would thoroughly purge his floor; see Matt. iii. 7, 10, 12. That day of Christ, when he came first, was as that day will be when he comes again—though a great and joyful day to those that embrace him, yet a *great and dreadful day* to those that oppose him. John Baptist was sent before the coming of this day, to give people notice of it, that they might get ready for it, and go forth to meet it.

3. On what errand he shall be sent: *He shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*; that is, "he shall be employed in this work; he shall attempt it; his doctrine and baptism shall have a direct tendency to it, and with many shall be successful: he shall be an instrument in God's hand *turning many to righteousness, to the Lord their God, and so making ready a people prepared for him*," Luke i. 16, 17. Note, The turning of souls to God and their duty is the best preparation of them for the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It is promised concerning John, (1.) That he shall give a turn to things, shall make a bold stand against the strong torrent of sin and impiety which he found in full force among the children of his people, and beating down all before it. This is called his *coming to restore all things* (Matt. xvii. 11), to set them to rights, that they may again go in the right channel. (2.) That he shall preach a doctrine that shall reach men's hearts, and have an influence upon them, and work a change in them. God's word, in his mouth, shall be *quick and powerful*, and a *discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. Many had their consciences awakened by his ministry who yet were not thoroughly wrought upon, such a spirit and power was there in it. (3.) That he shall turn the hearts of the fathers with the children, and of the children with the fathers (for so some read it), to God and to their duty. He shall call upon young and old to repent, and shall not labour in vain, for many of the fathers that are going off, and many of the children that are growing up, shall be wrought upon by his ministry. (4.) That thus he shall be an instrument to revive and confirm love and unity among relations, and shall bring them closer and bind them faster to each other, by bringing and binding them all to their God. He shall



prepare the way for that kingdom of heaven which will make all its faithful subjects of *one heart* and *one soul* (Acts iv. 32), which will be a kingdom of love, and will slay all enemies.

4. With what view he shall be sent on this errand. *Lest I come and smite the earth*, that is, the land of Israel, the body of the Jewish nation (that were of the earth earthy), *with a curse*. They by their impiety and impenitence in it had laid themselves open to the curse of God, which is a separation to all evil. God was ready to smite them with that curse, to bring utter ruin upon them, to strike home, to strike dead, with the curse; but he will yet once more try them, whether they will repent and return, and so prevent it; and therefore he sends John Baptist to preach repentance to them, that their conversion might prevent their confusion; so unwilling is God that any should perish, so willing to have his anger turned away. Had they universally repented and reformed, their repentance

would have had this desired effect; but, they generally rejecting the counsel of God in John's baptism, it proved against themselves (Luke vii. 30) and their land was smitten with the curse which both it and they lie under to this day. Note, Those must expect to be smitten with a sword, with a curse, who *turn not to him that smites them* with a rod, with a cross, Isa. ix. 13. Now the *axe is laid to the root of the tree*, says John Baptist, and it is ready to be smitten, to be cut down, *with a curse*; therefore *bring forth fruit meet for repentance*. Some observe that the last word of the Old Testament is a curse, which threatens the earth (Zech. v. 3), our desert of which we must be made sensible of, that we may bid Christ welcome, who comes with a blessing; and it is with a blessing, with the choicest of blessings, that the New Testament ends, and with it let us arm ourselves, or rather let God arm us, against this curse. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Amen.*







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